PRIVATE EYE

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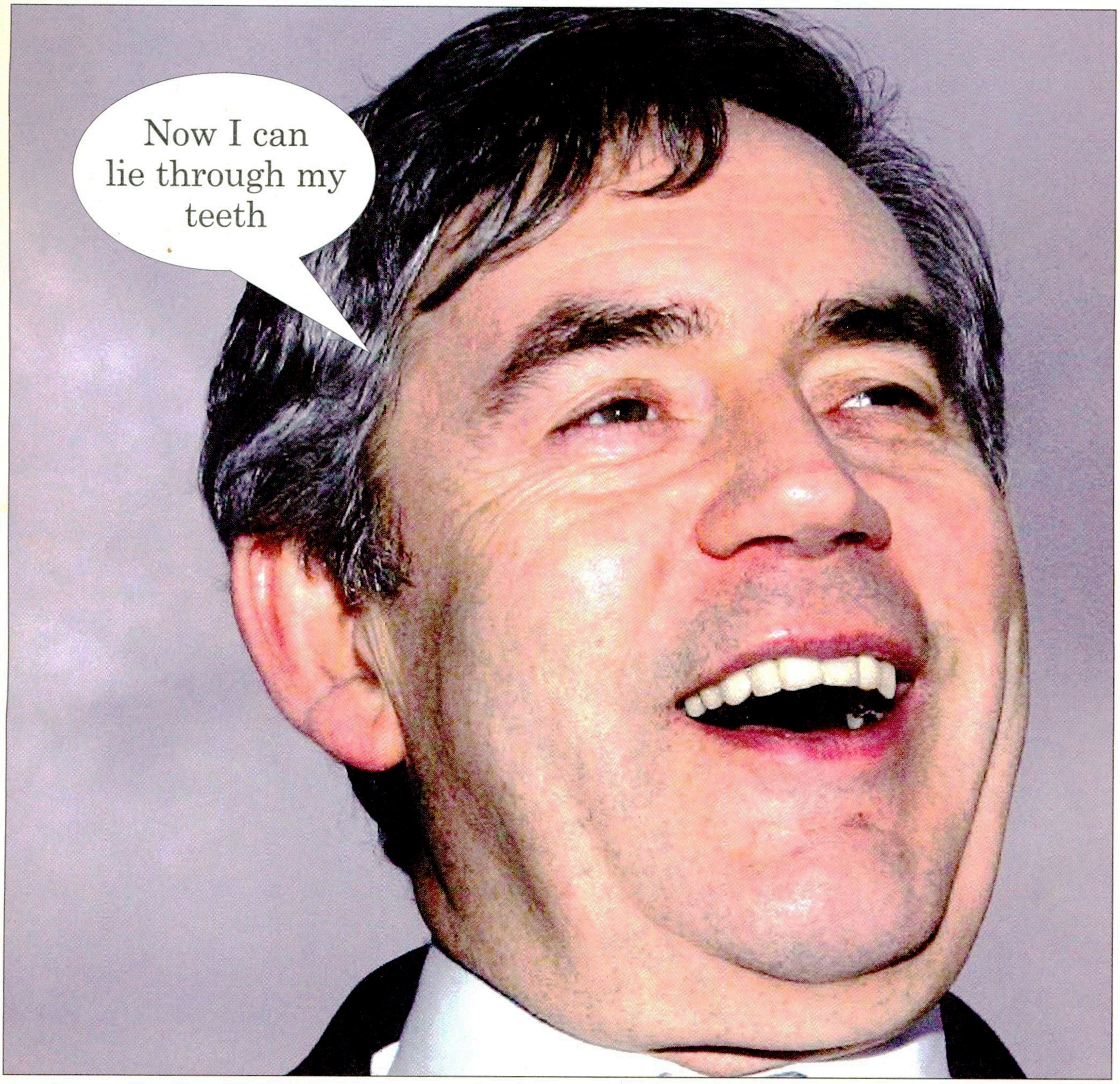

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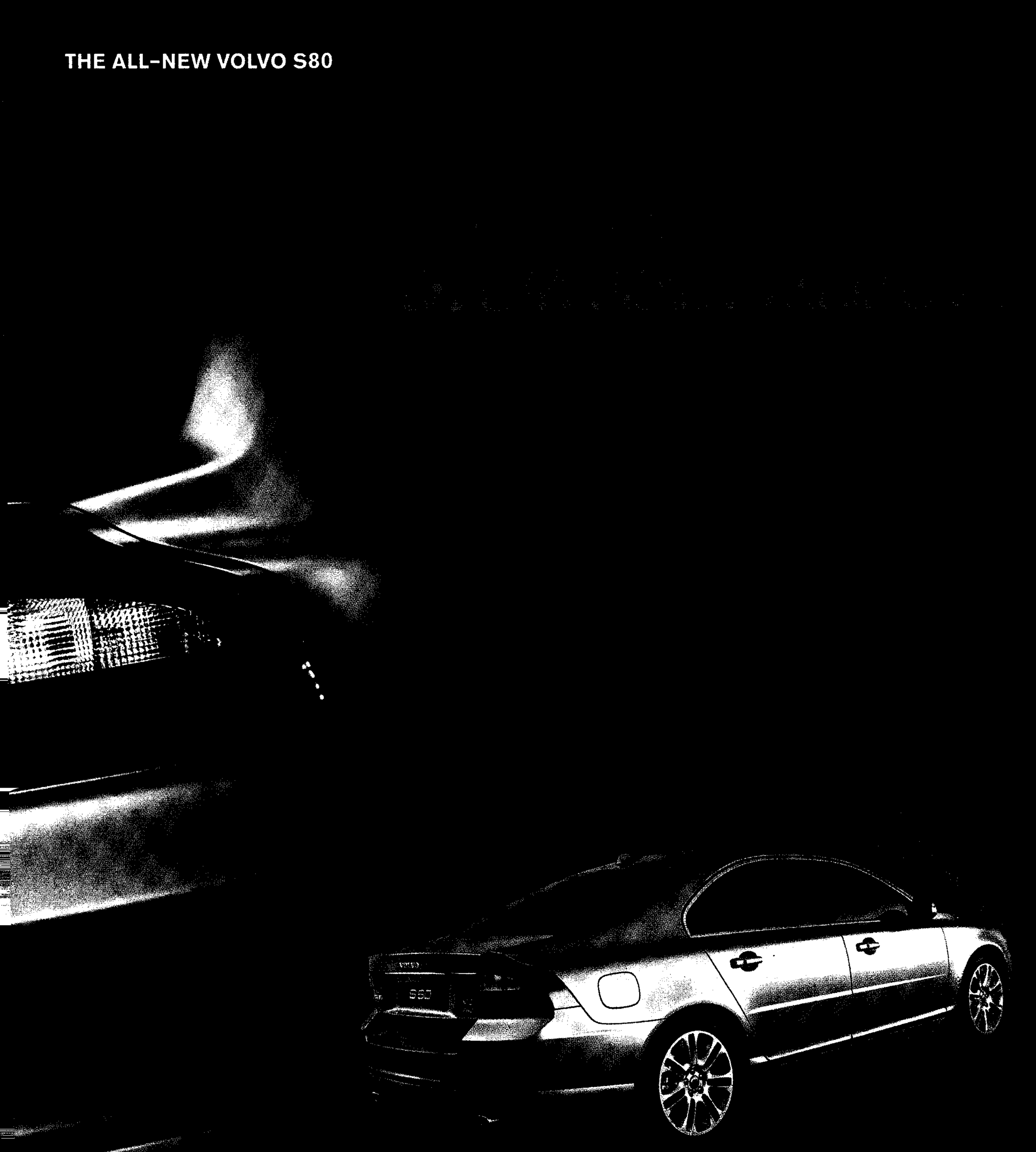

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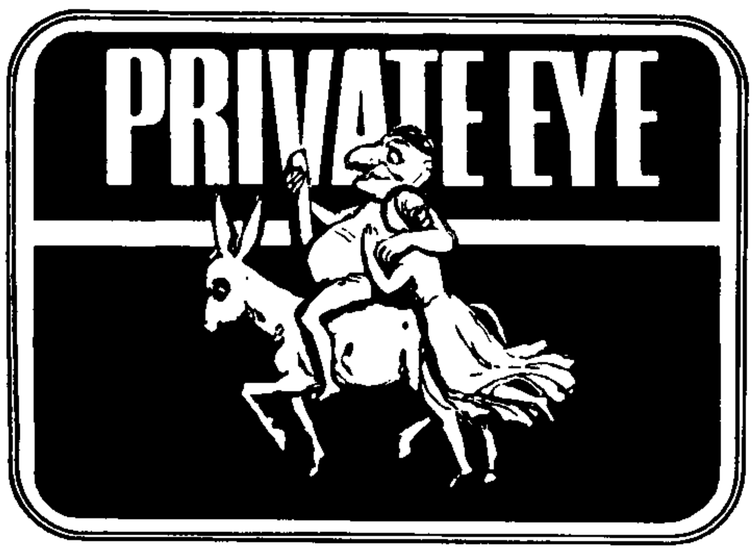

Desperate for a Crown...

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ALASTAIR CAMPBELL may claim that his diary will be published soon but *Sunday Times* readers know better, thanks to their political editor David "Crackers" Cracknell.

"Alastair Campbell has put off publishing his memoirs – which he has admitted will damage individuals within Labour – until Gordon Brown has left office after his expected spell as prime minister," Crackers revealed on 5 March last year. "The former Downing Street spin doctor has taken the decision, which could lose him hundreds of thousands of pounds, because he wants Brown to lead Labour to a fourth election victory." An unnamed friend of Campbell explained that "Alastair wants to help and he knows publishing the diaries straight after Blair leaves office would harm Gordon. He also genuinely wants Labour to win a fourth term. He's loyal to the party."

Still, Cracknell can hardly be blamed: Campbell himself seemed to confirm the story. A month earlier he had sent a letter to MPs investigating the spate of memoirs by former Whitehall insiders. "I would consider it wrong to publish in a manner or at a time detrimental to the interests of the government or the party I served," Campbell assured them. "With our media and politics as they are, I am in little doubt that publication would be used to try to damage the government, the Labour Party, the prime minister and others. For that reason alone I have decided against early publication."

A couple of months before that, in an interview with the *Northern Echo*, he explained why he deplored Sir Christopher Meyer's memoir. "I have made it clear that at some point in the future I will do a book and it will be very open and very frank about things... [But] government has got to be able to operate on a certain basis. There are things that happen, there are rows, there are disagreements, it is just the way of the world. To be pouring that out while these guys are still doing the job is wrong."

Note the plural. Though Blair won't be "doing the job" by the time Campbell's book appears, some of the other guys certainly will be – notably G. Brown. Although the diaries will be spattered with his customary fusillades against inaccurate hacks, in this case the main reason for their inaccuracy was that they believed what Alastair Campbell told them. Will the poor innocent saps never learn?

EDITORIAL
6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.
Tel: 020 7437 4017. Fax: 020 7437 0705.
Email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk
Website: www.private-eye.co.uk

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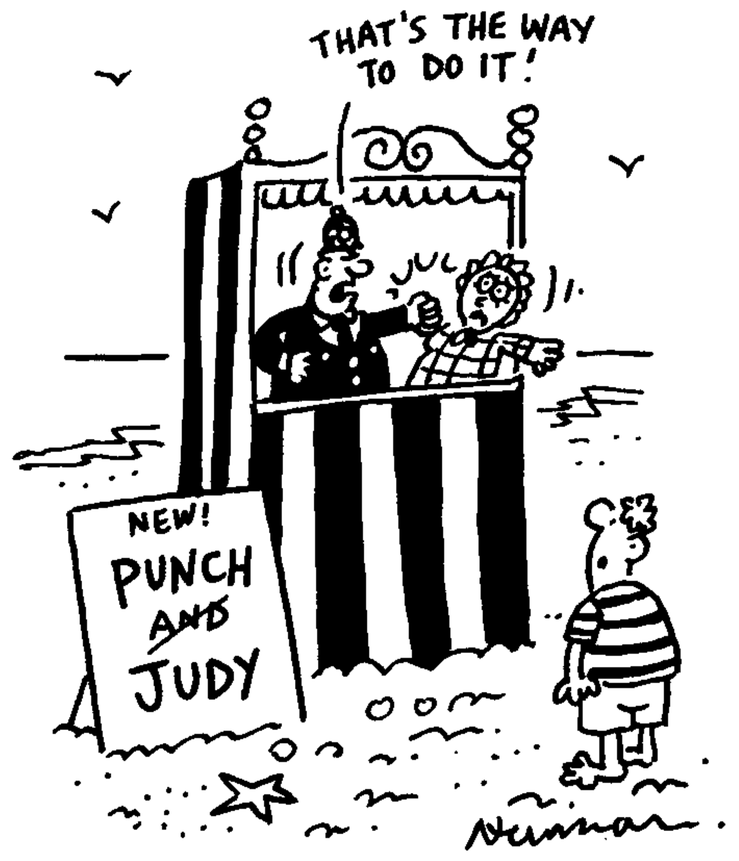


NO ONE – not even Conrad Black – can be found guilty by association. Which is just as well for him, otherwise his case would be lost already.

Not content with trying to persuade a US publisher to rush out his new biography of Richard "Tricky Dicky" Nixon in time for his trial this month, milord Black now enjoys the backing of nonagenarian businessman Jack Lyons, who has pledged financial support to the "Conrad is Innocent" campaign. Jack's grandson, Simon Lyons, sees parallels between the treatment of Black and of his grandpa. "There are many similarities," he said last week.

Not the most helpful testimonial, perhaps. For, as older readers may recall, Sir Jack Lyons was one of the Guinness Four, convicted in 1990 of conspiracy, theft and false accounting in the drinks company's takeover bid for Distillers. While the other three defendants – Ernest Saunders, Anthony Parnes and Gerald Ronson – went to jail, Lyons was stripped of his knighthood and fined £2.5m. He escaped a custodial sentence on the grounds of ill health: his lawyers said he had survived cancer and several heart attacks, but was so frail that a spell in the slammer might well kill him.

Seventeen years on, he is still with us – and now joining the motley crew backing Lord Black. With friends like that, how can Conrad fail?

A PATIENT in his 60s died after being found on fire in a corridor at one of the three Leeds mental health centres that failed fire safety reviews (*Eye* 1138).

The man died in hospital from serious burns after the incident at the Becklin Centre in February. The Leeds Mental Health Trust has made a number of changes to the award-winning PFI buildings since they were found to fall short on safety regulations in 2005, but one problem that was highlighted was that the layout of the building itself would make it harder for staff to monitor patients. The man was the fifth patient to die while in the centre's care.

Meanwhile, health and safety rep Paul Cockcroft, who was suspended for blowing the whistle on the problems, has been given a gold medal award by trade union Amicus.

HEALTH SECRETARY Patricia Hewitt has finally approved seven major PFI hospitals that have been stalled for months pending "affordability" reviews.

Hewitt took the opportunity of announcing the deals, valued at £1.5bn in total but ultimately costing many times more, to produce a "map of success" – a school project-style affair with dots all over the country showing where PFI hospitals have been built. "This map clearly illustrates that the NHS is opening hospitals not closing them," she declared with impeccable logic. There was no space for black marks showing the financial deficits created, services lost etc to the billions splurged on the scheme.

With unfortunate timing, Hewitt's junior Andy Burnham told a conference of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment the same day that "the need for large acute hospitals is diminishing". His statement echoed embarrassing remarks from a health official 18 months ago about "awfully grand schemes that are starting to give us a real problem".

So how exactly does PFI affect health services? The *Eye* asked under Freedom of Information laws for studies the government had performed on the subject, only to be told that, yes, it does hold such information but sadly it would prove too expensive to collate it and hand it over. We'll just have to settle for Patsy's "map of success". What more evidence could you want?

ONE of the biggest losers in the Northern Ireland assembly elections was David Cameron. While Tony "Hand of History" Blair avoided the place, Dave clocked up some extra carbon emissions by flying over to campaign for the Tory slate of candidates.

"I want politics in Northern Ireland to be about the real things – schools, hospitals, tax," he declared. "And I want the Conservative Party to be part of that new politics... My party's commitment to Northern Ireland, and to all its people, will be wholehearted and unshakeable."

Alas, Northern Ireland failed to return the compliment. The Tory slate was beaten not just by the DUP, Sinn Fein, Ulster Unionists and SDLP, but also by the Alliance, the Greens, multiple candidate Bob McCartney (who stood in six constituencies simultaneously) and the political wing of the illegal Ulster Volunteer Force.

Still, the Tories did triumph over George "Rainbow George" Weiss, whose main policy was the need to keep playing old Peter Cook sketches. Will they repeat this heroic performance in Edinburgh and Cardiff in May?

BLAIR: THE HAND OF HIS-CRONY!

Street of Shame

AN ALARMING headline in last Wednesday's *Guardian*: "Private Equity Deals Predicted to Spark Company Collapses."

The paper warned that a series of corporate meltdowns was likely next year because private equity deals are undermining companies "that under previous ownership structures might have survived".

But what of the *Grauniad*'s "ownership structure"? The Guardian Media Group is subsidised by its highly lucrative subsidiary Trader Media Group, publisher of *Autotrader*. Last May the paper announced its plans to float part of TMG on the stock market, but now it seems to be having second thoughts. It recently invited bids for a stake in TMG from Apax, Blackstone and Candover – all of which are, er, private equity firms.

TWO months on from News International's self-imposed ban on paparazzi shots of Prince William's girlfriend Kate Middleton, the *Sun* has managed to resist the lure of the long-lenses.

The commercial long-lenses, that is. On 6 March the paper devoted half a page to snaps of the royal couple on an Alpine ski trip – curiously similar to those which earned the *Sun* a Clarence House ban in 2004 for "intruding into their private skiing holiday". How did the paper acquire the latest photos? Not from a paparazzo, that's for sure. "They seemed so happy as they shared a moment on the slopes that *Sun* reader James Cherington just couldn't resist taking a quick snap," the paper reported. The moral high ground *and* you get the pictures cheaper – is this the best ban ever?

"I THINK it's demeaning for elected prime ministers to keep in with unelected men who happen to be proprietors," John Major tells the latest issue of *British Journalism Review*. "I thought it was improper to get too close to the press."

Anyone reading that might draw the conclusion that the former Prime Minister preferred to keep the Fourth Estate at arm's length.

Not so. Major gave up on the Tory press from 1995 only after they had given up on him. In 1990, however, during the Tory leadership battle, Major's campaign manager Norman Lamont called up Lord Stevens, then proprietor of the *Daily* and *Sunday Express* and the *Star*, to ask for his newspapers' endorsement of his candidate. Two years later, as Prime Minister, Major attended a lunch hosted by Associated Newspapers proprietor Lord Rothermere and senior executives of the *Daily Mail*. The following day the paper led with a story peddled by Conservative Central Office about alleged divisions in the Labour Party over economic policy.

Too close indeed!

WHILE the *Sun* yelled "Rip Off" and "Disgrace", the *Daily Star* took a more generous view of the latest TV scandals. "It would be a shame if phone competitions and votes could not be salvaged," its editorial suggested. "They can be fun."

And, of course, they can be lucrative – as Richard "Dirty" Desmond knows. A few months ago the *Star* took the three millionth call on its rant lines which allow readers to answer the big questions of the day ("Should Muslim ghettos be banned?", "Should devil dogs be put down?"). With 50p from every call going into Dirty Des's pocket that's another £1.5m effortlessly trousered.

The *Star* also runs stunts such as the recent "Win a VW Campervan" competition, for which punters have to ring in at £1.50 a minute. As we revealed, however, the vans in question were old bangers: with rust, moss and torn linings a common feature, the *Star*'s Mac wizards had to work their magic before touched-up photos of the prizes could appear in the rag. Do the words "rip" and "off" spring to mind?

WHILE returning from the lavatory last Thursday, one of the advertising staff at the *Express* magazines was accosted by the terrifying duo of Richard "Dirty" Desmond and his henchman Martin "Rottweiler" Ellice.

Dirty Des demanded proof that his sales force had enough "energy" – whereupon, with a firm hand on the man's back, he made him get down on the floor and do 20 press-ups.

Desmond and Ellice then joined him on the floor for this impromptu keep-fit session – after which, with energy levels restored, Dirty Des gave the luckless galley slave a high five and allowed him to go back to work.

"RUDE cards are no joke," declared the *Sunday Express* on 11 March, outraged at the thought that "children as young as five" might come across smutty greetings cards in the run-up to Mother's Day.

"Browsing in WH Smith last week, I was taken aback to discover great sheaves of 'funny' cards that plumbed the lowest U-bend of toilet humour and made references to sex (though that wasn't the word they used) which would have made a beer-soaked frat-boy wince in shame," blustered Flic Everett. "Card manufacturers have moved from bawdy vulgarity to coarse gynaecology."

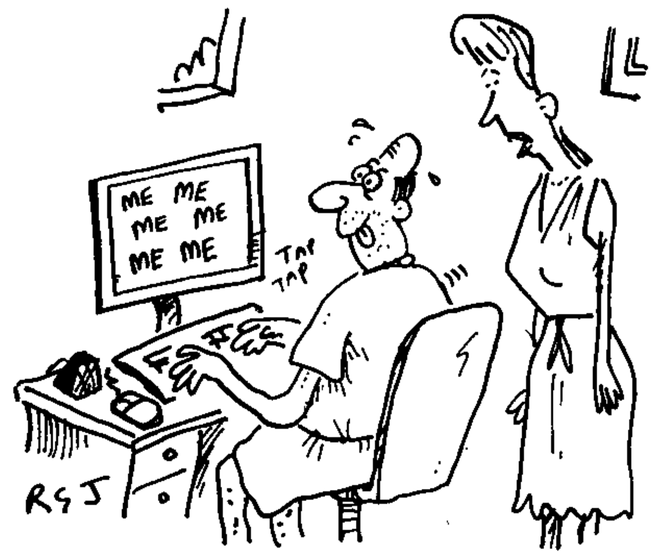
Programmes on the *Sunday Express*'s sister TV channel Television X that week included "Pretty Pregnant Pussies", "All New Anal Teens", "Filipino Sucky Fucky" and "Cock Hungry Whores".

Richard "Dirty" Desmond loves celebs – and if they don't love him back he has ways of pretending that they do. On the left is a photo of Johnny Vaughan, clearly carrying a copy of the Grauniad. By the time it appeared in last Friday's Daily Star, however, Johnny's paper of choice had been magically transformed to... the Daily Star!

Number crunchings

5 ■ Days of celebration for Liz Hurley's wedding, decried by press as excessive

193 ■ Articles in British national press about Liz Hurley's wedding in past month



"I don't know, Onan, I wish you'd find a less solitary activity than writing a blog"

SCARCELY a week goes by without yet another furious letter from David Blunkett's lawyers demanding that a newspaper retract some throwaway remark about his downfall.

The latest recipient is the *Guardian*, which referred to him fleetingly in a summary of Geoffrey Wheatcroft's book *Yo, Blair!* Here is the offending passage in the *Grauniad*'s "digested read" of Wheatcroft: "Blair has failed in each and every thing he has done. It even took him two goes to sack Peter Mandelson and David Blunkett."

His solicitors have now complained to the paper that Blunkett wasn't sacked: he resigned. Quite why they want another correction printed – whose only effect will be to remind readers yet again that Blunkett's ministerial career ended in ignominy not once but twice – is a mystery.

Police have no leads into dog thefts

Muswell Hill & Crouch End Times

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

2 February: Anthony Browne, chief political correspondent of *The Times*, writes a gushing feature about right-wing think-tanks. "Their influence was clear this week when Policy Exchange, very close to the Conservative leadership, issued an alarming report about the radicalisation of British Muslims, giving perfect cover for a hard-hitting speech on the same day by David Cameron, detailing how he would tackle the issue." Though several other think-tanks are mentioned, he emphasises that Policy Exchange is "Mr Cameron's favourite".

5 March: Anthony Browne announces that he is leaving *The Times* to become the new director of, er, Policy Exchange.

"THE automatic early release of prisoners is an affront," thundered the *News of the World* in January last year. "That criminals can walk free after serving as little as half of their sentences makes a mockery of pledges to get tough on lawbreakers."

An exclusive poll for the paper two months later made readers' views on the matter clear: "The overwhelming majority of voters – 75 percent – think the parole system should be scrapped, with prisoners made to serve sentences in full."

Curiously, the paper made no fuss at all after one high-profile con was released from prison on 26 February having served a mere *quarter* of his sentence – just one month in fact. His name? Clive Goodman, former royal editor of the *News of the World*.

REBEKAH WADE may have parted from hubby Ross Kemp, but her enthusiasm for another bullet-headed tough-guy, Johnny "Mad Dog" Adair, goes from strength to strength.

During the Peter Mandelson era at Stormont, as editor of the News of the Screws Rebekah endorsed "Mad Dog" as an election candidate in a front page editorial for the paper's Northern Irish edition. Alas, Adair was back in prison by polling day and missed his chance to become a professional peacemaker. But during the latest Ulster election campaign, Wade purchased the rights from her old pal John Blake to Adair's autobiography Mad Dog, which is to be published on 26 March.

Blithely ignoring all that Press Complaints Commission stuff about not paying criminals for their wares, Wade splashed Adair across the front and four inside pages of the Sun's Ulster edition on the first day of serialisation, with three pages a day for the following three days.

Most of the space was taken up with Adair boasting about how he fought his "war" against the IRA (most often by shooting Catholic taxi drivers in the back of the head). But in fact his most recent conviction was for punching his cancer-stricken wife in the face, after she failed to show him enough "respect" – a stance slightly at odds with the Sun's crusade against domestic violence.

Needless to say, Adair's ravings were omitted from copies of the Sun distributed in the Irish republic. But Rebekah's decision to try and gain support from the Paisleyite hordes in the North raises the question of how she and her Murdoch colleagues are going to handle the other devolved elections, in Scotland and Wales.

With the Dirty Digger's approval, the Scottish Sun used to support the SNP – until it ran a sudden front-page editorial, headed "Bravehearts Must Wait", signalling a vote for Blair instead. That wait may now be over. In their Caledonian editions the Sun, News of the World and even the Times have recently started flirting with the SNP again. Why so? Because the Nats appear likely to top the poll in May, and Rupert likes to back winners.

THE *Times* proved it was down with the kids on 2 March by devoting an entire page to the NME Awards, noting amongst others the triumph of Enter Shikari in the John Peel Award for Musical Innovation.

As *Eye* readers are no doubt aware, Enter Shikari are a dance-metal band who combine elements of trance, post-hardcore and screamo in many of their songs, and the highest position they have reached in the singles charts so far is an extremely credible number 151.

The *Times*, however, chose to illustrate their victory with a picture of Colombian singer Shakira, who has sold nearly fifty million records worldwide and had number ones in the US, UK, Spain, Australia and much of Latin America.

P.S. Thank you to the 14-year-old *Eye* reader who very patiently explained all this to us.

TWO months after the *Daily Mail* managed to confuse prostitute-frequenting peer Lord Lambton with happily married millionaire Lord Levy (see *Eye* 1176), its sister publication *Metro* may have gone one better in terms of potentially ruinous errors.

In a 9 March story on Guantanamo Bay the freesheet noted that one of the prison's inmates was "Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the man suspected of masterminding the September 11 attacks on the US in 2001". Alas, they illustrated this with a picture of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Ruler of Dubai and Vice-President of the United Arab Emirates.

Well, if you're going to wrongly accuse someone of mass murder, you might as well go for a man with $27.8 billion in the bank…

JUST FANCY THAT!

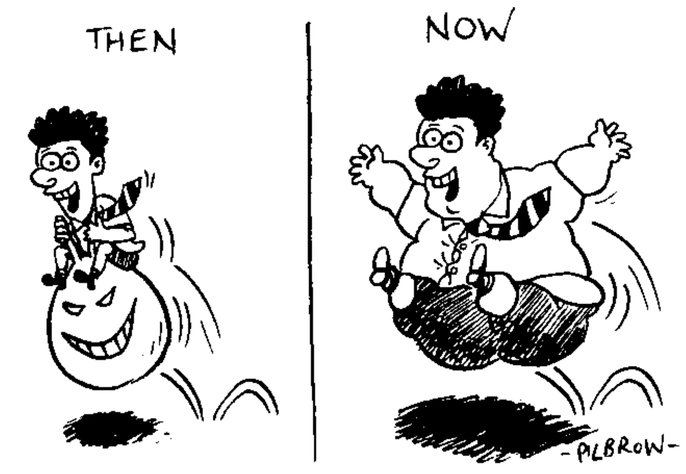
"Worst of all was the disastrous decision to enter into a six-year wrangle with the US-based Franklin Mint, which produces souvenirs and was manufacturing a Diana 'bride doll' and memorial plates." – Zoe Brennan deplores "tacky deals" by the Diana Memorial Fund which have "betrayed" the princess's memory, *Daily Mail*, page 26, February 28.

"Royal Doulton Diana Figurine for Every Reader" – *Daily Mail*, page 1, February 28.

IN THE WEEK the *Daily Mail*'s Ian Wooldridge died, it was good to see that the age of classy sports journalism is not over.

Take *Newham Recorder* columnist and former editor Tom Duncan. The 28 February edition of the East London paper carried an alarming headline: "GANG RAPED – and it seems the guilty will walk free." The copy, however, described not a violent attack but, er, the fortunes of West Ham United football club. "For every West Ham United supporter events at Upton Park this season have been like witnessing the gang rape of someone you love," Duncan declared in his intro, triggering an avalanche of complaints to the paper and the PCC.

What of the editor who permits such crass copy in his paper? Step forward one Colin Grainger, who was recruited as cub reporter by Tom Duncan more than 30 years ago. Grainger recently told an interviewer: "Tom taught me everything I know." Indeed.



THE *Mirror* managed to correct an embarrassing faux-pas before its second edition on 2 March.

An eagle-eyed member of staff spotted that its "Eton Trifles" feature on the "privileged ex-public school boys" of the Tory front bench showed a picture of the late Labour peer Lord Howell of Aston Manor (Handsworth Grammar School and the Hercules Bicycle Factory) instead of shadow deputy leader of the Lords Lord Howell of Guilford (Eton and Kings College Cambridge). The picture was swiftly replaced.

Sadly, no one appeared to notice that they had also illustrated the profile of old Etonian front bencher Lord Howard of Rising with a picture of Michael Howard, an alumnus of Llanelli Grammar School. Still, he is a fairly obscure figure. He was only the leader of the opposition at the last election.

LUVVIES

"People say I appear controlled, and I can be, but in real life, I'm all over the place emotionally. I cry terribly easily. Just a minute ago, I was reading an article about Kate Winslet in Vogue, and I love her so much, I started crying, realising how great she is and how far I have to go."

ANNE HATHAWAY
Style

Submitted by Elaine Darkin.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

"EXCLUSIVE: Pop star Robbie Williams has checked out early from a tough US rehab centre," shrieked the front page of the *Sun* on 7 March.

"It was reported that the singer was staying at the Meadows Centre, Arizona. But the *Sun* can reveal he was actually at the £700-a-night Cottonwood de Tucson centre – one of the harshest in America."

And where, pray, was this misinformation reported? Er, in an exclusive in the *Sun* on 14 February, when showbiz editor Victoria Newton breathlessly revealed that "Robbie is believed to have checked into the Meadows clinic in Wickenberg, Arizona, the same rehab centre which helped supermodel Kate Moss deal with health problems in the past."

YET another scoop from excitable *Observer* columnist Will Hutton, who is fascinated to learn that a book by militant atheist Sam Harris is selling well in America.

"Harris quotes passages from the Bible that I did not know existed," he raves. "One passage from *Deuteronymy* encourages Christians to stone to death anybody who tries to draw them away from their God."

Alas, anyone rushing to the Bible to look this up will seek in vain. There are no references to Christians in *Deuteronymy* – possibly because it was written well before the birth of Christ.

'Quote in here please over three lines cheers'

The Times

FOOTBALL NEWS

GORDON BROWN's hasty promise to bid for the 2018 World Cup has forced the PM-in-waiting to grovel to some very shady characters indeed.

World football governing body FIFA's "rotation" system means a European country can't expect to host the games before 2026, leaving Gordon in the tricky position of having to overturn a long-established Buggins' turn principle. Hence his rolling out the red carpet to FIFA president Sepp Blatter and entourage at Number 11 two weeks ago, with Football Association bigwigs in attendance. As Blatter wants to keep the national associations sweet to secure his own re-election in May, he left the door ajar to rule changes that would allow a European (probably English) World Cup in 2018.

Next stop for Herr Blatter was an "in-depth" interview with the BBC's John Inverdale organised by the Sports Industry Group (SIG) for a couple of hundred sports business suits at Bloomberg's London headquarters. As promised in the last issue, the *Eye* sent Inverdale a copy of a Swiss court judgement showing that FIFA had unlawfully repaid 2.5 million Swiss francs in bribes trousered by its officials. But would the BBC man mention it?

Inverdale did indeed bring up FIFA's reputation for lining its top officials' pockets. Blatter replied with his stock (bogus) claim that the whole problem was an "image given by the media" and that there were "no irregularities which will ever be proved because they are not true". For some reason Inverdale didn't then mention the damning court verdict that flatly contradicted this. When the *Eye*'s reporter raised his arm in the Q&A session to put the point himself, he felt a hand on his shoulder followed by a finger wag from SIG's chairman Nick Keller; press questions were strictly banned.

Minutes later Blatter was safely in his cab to the airport, a good day's work done: politicians and businessmen teased with the prospect of the 2018 World Cup, and nobody had MENTIONED THE BRIBES.

ALAN MILBURN used his new "2020 Vision" website, designed to annoy Gordon Brown – sorry, promote progressive ideas – to announce that Labour must support "hard-working families, regardless of class". Who could he mean?

Milburn famously left the Cabinet to "spend more time with his family". His family must have told him not to bother, because the former health minister is now supplementing his MP's salary with a part–time job at the chemists – £30,000 a year as vice-chair of the healthcare advisory panel for Lloyds Pharmacy. Lloyds also pays former Blair aide Baroness Sally Morgan and former Tory minister Lord Newton to sit on its panel.

While many Labour figures worry about private equity takeover merchants, Milburn has rejoined the advisory committee of Bridgepoint Capital – so don't expect too many attacks on the money men on his website. Milburn first joined this board in 2004, shortly before a Bridgepoint firm called Alliance Medical won a multi-million-pound contract to run MRI scans for the NHS (*Eyes passim*). Milburn left Bridgepoint and returned to government for the 2005 election campaign, but rejoined the firm this January, according to the Parliamentary Register, for an extra £30,000 a year.

Bridgepoint's enthusiasm for the former health minister may reflect its investments. It still owns Alliance as well as the two agencies supplying medical staff to the Health Service (Match Group and Firstpoint) and two companies selling I.T. services to the NHS (Capula Health and Clinical Assessment Services). Should any "hard-working families" fail to work hard enough, they may get a knock from a debt collection agency called "1st Credit", also owned by Bridgepoint.

Milburn's partner in his website, Charles Clarke, is also a hard-working family man. As the *Eye* revealed in issue 1169, Clarke is a director of LJ Group, a schools equipment firm looking for work under Labour's Academies and "Building Schools for the Future" programmes. Clarke is also an adviser to a law firm, Beachcroft, helping with "regulatory" matters. This January he even found the time to join an investment bank, Charles Street Securities.

SURE enough Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Ed "Mini-Brown" Balls have swung behind private equity as the row over this aggressive approach to business ownership escalates. All have emphasised the sector's ability to create jobs and ignored its even greater skill in shedding them and diminishing those left behind, as happened at AA.

Private equity's leading lights have been polishing their image to fend off a clampdown. Guy Hands of Terra Firma warned against becoming the "unacceptable face" of capitalism, the trade body BVCA announced its own review and the beancounters who earn so much from the corporate finance deals and tax planning that trail in private equity's wake pointed out that the companies pay £4bn in corporation tax every year.

Given their share of the economy and profits, that's about half of what you might expect. Try to unravel any private equity structure and you soon come to a dead end marked "offshore", whereby the firms pour profits into tax havens in the form of tax-deductible interest payments. Terra Firma, for example, has a UK presence called Terra Firma Capital Partners Ltd which is owned by a Cayman Islands company called London 58 Ltd, itself ultimately owned by Hands. The UK company pays less than £1m a year in tax, while Terra Firma is known to make hundreds of millions, if not billions, for itself and its investors (not least from companies such as Annington, which manages the MoD's ropey family accommodation – see In The Back, p27).

The Treasury has announced a limited review of the tax rules, but don't expect many of private equity's sweeties to be taken away by its fans in Downing Street.

A CHARMING display of traditional Old Labour comradeship at the Gay Hussar restaurant in Soho.

Downstairs, at a leaving lunch for a *Tribune* hack, are Michael Foot (age 93) plus veteran pro-Labour hacks such as Geoffrey Goodman and Ian Aitken. Upstairs is a posse of elderly ex-Communists known as the Anjou lunch club, whose special guest is Tony Benn (81).

Benn and Foot did have a falling-out when Foot was party leader, but that was a generation ago. Time to let bygones be bygones? Of course not. When Benn descends after his repast he walks straight past Foot and his chums, ignoring their greetings and ostentatiously cutting them all dead.

In fine fraternal spirit, a Tribunite gives his verdict on the departing Benn: "What an old cunt, eh?"

CALLED TO ORDURE

OUR elected tribunes are seldom hotter-to-trot than when discussing matters miles from the average voter's daily existence. Take the Commons' two-day debate on the future of the House of Lords: no way a "Dog and Duck" issue, yet a great event.

Many admitted that the House really needing reform was not the Lords but the Whip-controlled Commons. Having flayed themselves to a modest extent MPs then went and voted to blow the Lords to smithereens by saying it should be 100 percent elected.

There was encouraging impertinence towards the main political parties and the way they have warped the parliamentary system. Long may this continue! Early in the debate Fiona Mactaggart (Lab, Slough) spoke for the nation when she shouted a rudery at Tory frontbencher Theresa May. Tin-eared May was honking her way through a dull speech when Mactaggart realised she could bear no more. Hansard demurely records only: "Interruption. Hon Members: 'Oh!'". Research suggests that multi-millionaire Mactaggart may have said, "stupid cow" – or another word beginning with C.

With that off everyone's chest Ken Clarke (Con, Rushcliffe) stated the constitutional position. "We have a Commons that has lost its powers and an upper House that is something of an historical anachronism." Clarke wanted a 100 percent elected Lords but reckoned there was "absolutely nil" chance of it happening.

John Maples (Con, Stratford-on-Avon), who was happy with the status quo, said it was no good leaving the choice of peers to some new commission. Such a body would be "tailor-made for my good friend Sir Hayden Phillips, and a more admirable public servant I cannot envisage". Heavy sarcasm, this. Retired mandarin Sir Hayden, onetime underling to Roy Jenkins and Derry Irvine, is the embodiment of Establishment stitch-up. Why else do you think he was chosen by Tony Blair to head the report into party funding options?

Lots of MPs spoke about the importance of preserving the "primacy" of the Commons but Douglas Hogg (Con, Sleaford) feared this was "an empty phrase". Hogg, whose father Lord Hailsham once spoke of the "elective dictatorship", may have a point. When the Commons is so bullied by Whips what sort of "primacy" does it have?

Intellectual Tory Richard Shepherd (Aldridge) felt that "the high tide mark has been reached for party government". High-brow Shepherd was ruled by logic and wanted an elected Lords with shortish (i.e. five-year) terms. Generally speaking, the MPs in favour of leaving the Lords as an appointed body were the more romantic types. Plus John Prescott, who must have seen his chance of a Westminster retirement scheme going down the plughole.

Some realism was sounded by Chris Mullin (Lab, Sunderland S) when he said that if the Lords is elected on the corrupt "List" system, which allows the parties great leeway, it would be just as bad as having Tony's Cronies.

Many MPs admitted that elections would mean numerous excellent peers being lost to Westminster. Can you really see retired military chiefs and high court judges, octogenarian doctors and half-deaf humanitarians being jiggered to campaign for election? So who will we get in their place?

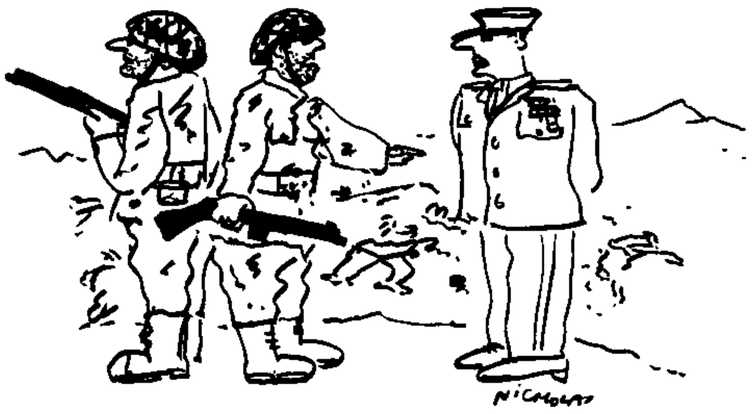
Possible answer: losers who couldn't get into the Commons. As Maples put it: "The standards of intelligence, talent and ability needed to get into the Commons are not superhuman or of Olympic proportions. So if the other House consists of people who are not smart enough or good enough to get into this place, what will be up there?" The House of Halfwits, perhaps.

Some of those demanding that "we should trust the people" were MPs with completely safe seats who have never had to worry about the fickle nature of voters. In this category fell the cocky duo of Chris Bryant (Lab, Rhondda) and John Bercow (Con, Buckingham), once a hard-line right-winger, now ostentatiously wet. Bercow's habit of "hear-hearing" crusty Tories in an arch manner is becoming a matter of widespread irritation. He thinks it is funny but it simply sounds prattish. Bryant, meanwhile, showed what a peculiarly duff heckler he is by trying to make a wisecrack during the speech of Julian Lewis (Con, New Forest E). At that very moment Lewis was trying to pay tribute to three former colleagues who had died. "I am not sure why the hon. Gentleman finds that amusing," said Lewis witheringly. Ex-vicar Bryant gave a gormless grin.

The debate's Champagne moment came when hairy Lib Dem David Heath was burbling away about "democratic renewal". Up popped Yorkshire Tory Philip Davies. Why were the Lib Dems so worried about democratic accountability, he said, when "they are more than happy to give more and more powers to an unelected European Commission?" Heath almost swallowed his beard.

Any reform of the Commons, by the way, will have to be generated from inside Parliament. Peers have the right to start Bills in their Chamber. Is it not time for them to kickstart a Future of the Commons Bill?

'Gavel Basher'



"We are winning the battle for hearts and minds; there are some hearts down here and I can see some bits of mind over there"

TONY BLAIR and John Reid were evidently so worried about a revolt over their plans to privatise the probation service that they employed bullying tactics to push through the controversial Offender Management Bill.

Fifty-one expected Labour rebels came under extraordinary pressure from the Whips. Newcastle-under Lyme MP Paul Farrelly was told his private member's bill on better rights for temporary and agency workers would face every obstacle in getting Commons time. Farrelly had the support of more than 100 MPs for his Bill, which meant the Whip was powerless to intervene – although the government did, as expected, talk his Bill out. Other MPs were told their careers would be over. One, David Drew, was said to have been surrounded by four Whips as he went through the opposition lobby.

The bullyboy tactics, coupled with a sudden decision to send three MPs abroad, worked. The rebels were too few and the measure – which gives the Home Office powers to let private firms, charities and voluntary groups take over probation services – scraped by with a majority of 25. But victory is not yet in the bag: the contentious Bill faces an even more tempestuous ride in the Lords.

"Oh dear, oh dear. What cowboy did your face transplant?"

TRANSPORT minister and Thanet South MP Steve Ladyman is keen, as part of his brief, to encourage people to leave their cars at home and get back on the buses.

In his regular column on page 12 of the *Thanet Extra* local paper on 23 February, Ladyman deplored the modern tendency for "people [to] drive more and take the bus less". If Britain is to "beat climate change and tackle congestion", he observed, "that trend has to be changed".

How true! On page 22 of the same edition there is a story about how Kent's 17 MPs between them racked up £55,000 in travel expenses last year – most of it by using their cars. The accompanying chart reveals that the third heaviest car user was one Steve Ladyman, who claimed £4,225 in motoring expenses. He also claimed £378 in train fares. The great omnibus enthusiast's claims for bus journeys, meanwhile, totalled precisely zero.

THE campaign by Burberry workers in Rhondda to stop their jobs being sent overseas got plenty of media attention, but sadly it made little impact in the home of US Ambassador Robert Tuttle and his wife Maria.

Mrs Tuttle, whose husband is a millionaire car dealer, decided to wear a Burberry coat on a visit to the Welsh Assembly, 20 miles down the road from the Treorchy plant. To compound the fashion gaffe, she walked into Assembly Member and campaign supporter Leighton Andrews as he was showing 30 guests from the Rhondda around the building.

A red-faced spokesman for the American Embassy insisted that "Mrs Tuttle's choice of attire was neither an economic nor a political statement, but a response to the elements".

"Have you tried this? It used to be all the rage"

HIGH on the list of donors who helped David Cameron raise a record £24m for the Conservative Party last year is Michael Spencer, head of City broking firm ICAP. According to the latest figures from the Electoral Commission, he gave £1m through a holding company.

Spencer has been a controversial figure since 2002 when an action brought by rival firm Cantor Fitzgerald accused him of deliberately targeting its staff for recruitment at a time when it had just lost 95 percent of its broking personnel in the World Trade Centre atrocities of September 2001. "I would love to plan a heist," Spencer wrote a month after the attack, in an email later produced in court. Two weeks later, he went further: "Oh I would love to put one up their bottom … and this is the time I have been waiting for for just a few years!!!" High Court Judge Richard McCombe later ruled that ICAP had offered an "unlawful inducement" to entice a Cantor broker to break his contract.

Spencer made his donation to the Conservatives in April last year. Only five months later Cameron was giving speeches calling for a "responsibility revolution" in business. "A healthy business sector lies at the heart of a healthy society," the Tory leader argued. "Society won't work as well as it should if it regards this prime source of its wealth, jobs and taxes with distrust or suspicion."

No doubt he treated Spencer to a firm lecture on corporate ethics before trousering his cheque.

'Backbiter'

HIGH PRINCIPALS

AS YET ANOTHER university – Oxford Brookes – prepares to part-privatise its English Language teaching service, advertising watchdogs have told the company involved to stop referring to itself as "a university-led initiative" – because it isn't.

The claim was made in a job advert for a centre director for INTO University of Exeter, which is a 50-50 joint venture between INTO University Partnerships and the university. Following a complaint that the ad was misleading, the Advertising Standards Authority instructed INTO's PR people to change it and remove references to INTO as a "university-led" initiative in future.

Several universities have so far bought INTO's promise of attracting more international students (paying juicy fees) despite staff concern about the impact on academic standards as they attempt to churn more students through the courses for less money. INTO chairman Andrew Collin was the founder of Study Group International, which he sold to the Daily Mail group for £44m in 1999. Study Group is also in the process of snapping up university partners willing to outsource their language foundation courses (*Eyes passim*).

Down on the Farm

UNTIL last month David Dobbin, 43, of Backford near Chester, was the owner of a 567-strong dairy herd which represented his entire livelihood. Several of his cows had won prizes and the herd's value was well over half a million pounds.

In 2005 Defra officials inspected the voluminous documentation required for his cattle under EC rules, including "passports" and numbered ear tags for each animal, and found what they claimed to be a number of unspecified irregularities. Instead of discussing how these could be sorted out, Defra last November asked Cheshire trading standards officials to seize all his passports, making it illegal for him to move any animals off his farm and virtually wiping out his income.

Last month the officials removed his entire herd to another farm elsewhere in Cheshire, stating that it was their intention to destroy all 567 animals. Their authority, they claimed, was an EC regulation, 494/98, issued at the height of the BSE panic. This lays down that "if the keeper of an animal cannot prove its identification within two working days, it shall be destroyed without delay under the supervision of the veterinary authorities, and without compensation from the competent authorities". Although these powers given to ministry officials were quite unprecedented, the regulation only permitted them to destroy animals which could not be identified. Defra has never claimed that the paperwork for most of Mr Dobbin's cows was not in order.

Thanks to his Liverpool lawyers, Kirwans, Mr Dobbin managed to get a High Court injunction, giving his cows a stay of execution less than an hour before the slaughter was due to begin. He also then won leave from Mr Justice Goldring for judicial review on the grounds that Defra was acting way beyond its legal powers. But at the beginning of this month Defra insisted that unless Mr Dobbin could prove the identification of every single one of his cows, they must still all be destroyed. Since all his cattle passports – the most obvious means of identification – had been confiscated, this was impossible. The officials said he would instead have to provide individual DNA identification for each animal within two days, which would also have been physically impossible – not least since the cows had all been moved to another location to which Mr Dobbin was not allowed access.

On 6 March, therefore, the High Court had no choice but to give Defra's officials permission to proceed with the slaughter. The need for this was particularly urgent, they said, because they did not have the resources to look after or milk the cattle properly, and this was causing severe "animal welfare" problems. When informed of the judge's ruling over the phone, Mr Dobbin burst into tears, and on 7 March the destruction of his herd began. All he can hope for now is that the judicial review, set for nine months' time, might at least confirm that Defra acted beyond its powers. But in the meantime this is scant consolation for the sight of his entire life and livelihood going up in smoke just because Defra's officials have been so zealous in exercising for the first time powers greater than any given to British officials before them. For the pleasure of ruining a man's life and killing nearly 600 healthy animals for no practical purpose, it must seem a small price to pay.

'Mucksprea der'

"The lack of action by the Highways Agency means that this busy trunk road poses a serious threat to pubic safety."

Shropshire Star

FTVE

Castaway (BBC1)

THE Beeb has never been lucky with reality TV. The first real British attempt at the genre was funded by the licence fee: seven years ago, *Castaway 2000* dumped volunteers on a Hebridean island and watched to see who got on and who got off.

Nobody, though, really thought of it as reality TV because the whole thing had been filmed in advance, the producers made the necessary anthropological noises and the winner – who emerged in the way that Tory Party leaders used to – was posh and presentable, literally so as he became a TV host: Ben Fogle.

At which point, other channels followed up with much more vicious lift-em-up and kick-em-out shows. But while everyone was going crazy for *Big Brother*, *Pop Idol* and *I'm A Celebrity*, nobody was sure what the governors would make of public service channels running a youth-oriented show for chavs and so controllers held back. By the time the Corporation found the courage to jump on the bandwagon – with *Fame Academy* – it already had several wheels off.

Now they've had another bit of bad luck with this stuff. Envying the ratings Channel 4 and ITV1 have been racking up with their elimination house and island shows, BBC1 honcho Peter Fincham decided to bring back **Castaway**. Unfortunately, though, the *Celebrity Big Brother* racism row developed while the show was in production and the scandal over voting and charging on entertainment shows broke the week before it reached the screens.

So, catastrophically, the series reaches the screen charged with being on absolutely best behaviour: there can be no hint of bullying or sensationalist editing among the contestants and any interactive elements must be conducted impeccably. Incredibly, the BBC's latest entry to reality TV will be under even more pressure from editorial boards and regulators than would have been the case seven years ago.

This is extremely unfortunate because the new *Castaway* was clearly set up to end the BBC's squeamishness in this arena. Although the continuity announcer before the first show tried to pretend that there was still some scientific rationale to the thing – "Let the experiment begin!" – the only experiment going on involved the BBC trying to clone all the developments they'd missed out on since the original *Castaway*.

Symbolically, the island on which the contestants are stuck has been moved from Scotland to the Pacific, home to *I'm A Celebrity* and *Survivor*. Although, of course, there have been the traditional Sunday newspaper spoilers suggesting that there's really a hotel and a 24-hour Tesco just across the road from the exposed New Zealand wilderness atoll on which they're supposedly living.

Also, in contrast with the original, the game is still in progress as transmission begins and the show will contain a number of votes. And, showing most strongly the way television has been going in the past seven years, those taking apart seem to have been selected on the now traditional criterion of being the people viewers would most like to come round and watch the show with them. There's a mouthy cow who insists on telling people what she thinks of them ("I'm noisy, chatty, me!"), a "lap-dancer from Bolton" and an obese "unpublished fiction writer" who ominously warns that "there's all sorts of stuff going on in my head all the time". Tapping his crammed noddle, he advises: "You really wouldn't want to be in here!"

They tried to make things nasty as quickly as possible. As early as show two, Jason, fingered in a secret vote among the islanders as the one who had helped least in setting up the shelters, was taken out and banished to an island of his own. But, stung by the Shilpa Shetty business, the new *Castaway* seems mainly concerned with establishing that reality TV can be a decent, healing thing. Accordingly, most of the second programme consisted of the multi-racial cast swimming with dolphins in the bay.

The result of this nervousness about giving offence is that they've ended up with a show which, like that unfortunate chap called Cunis, is neither one thing nor the other. It isn't even easier to work out the broadcast status of the show. Host Danny Wallace talks, comme Ant and Dec, about "going in to see the castaways in a minute" but the show feels like a pre-rec which incorporates even earlier pre-recs.

Castaway may show that the genre can be nice. But, in again missing the moment for reality shows, the BBC has also been forced to miss the point.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

THE inability of rolling news to report "breaking news" was highlighted by the BBC's coverage of the Ethiopia hostage affair.

The BBC had sent Adam Mynott to report from the remote desert between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Almost as soon as he got there, Peter Sissons confronted him with the "breaking news" that the kidnappers were from Eritrea: "Are these the kidnappers?"

"Well we don't know one way or the other," Mynott revealed, adding that the info "comes from a single source of information which is uncorroborated" – and as such should not have been broadcast by the post-Hutton Beeb.

"There clearly is a void of information, just speculation and rumour," Mynott speculated, before Sissons interrupted: "Er, Adam, as you are speaking, Agence France Presse is reporting that Eritrea has denied involvement."

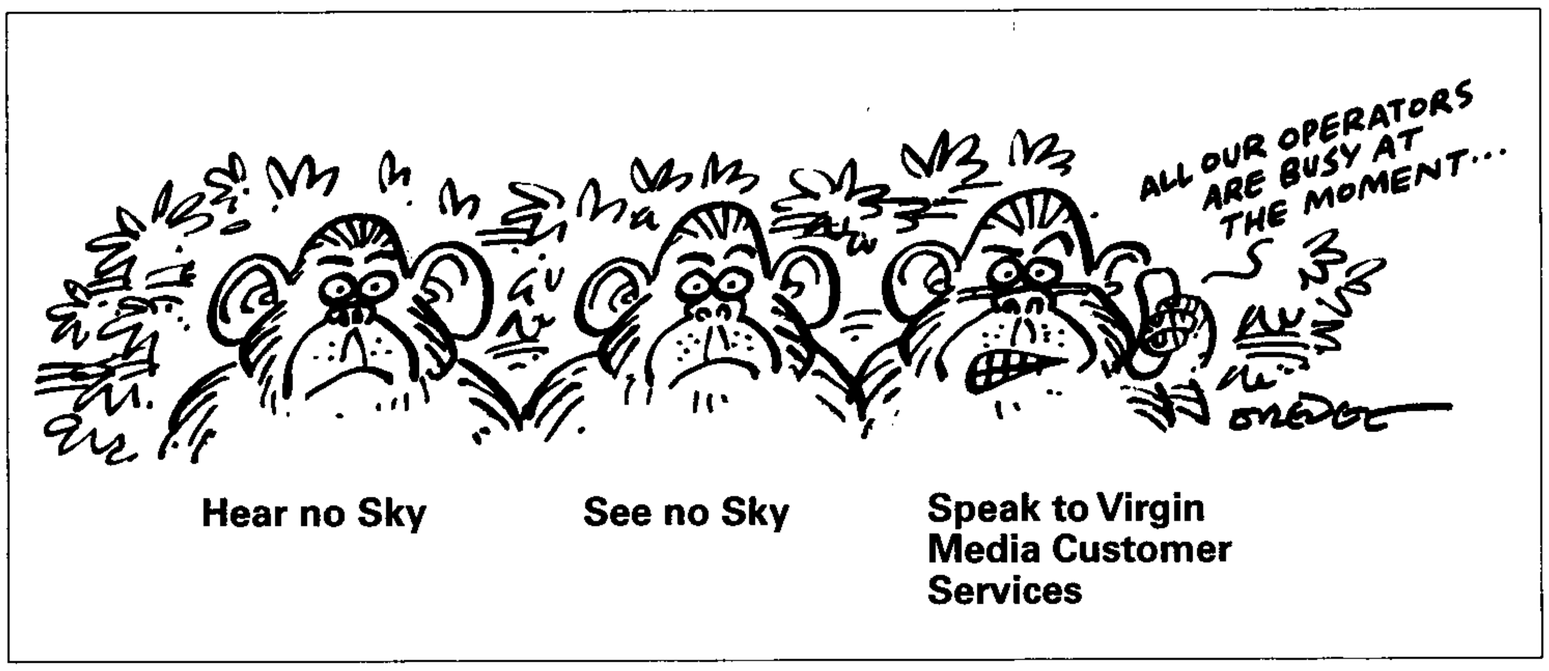
WHEN the BBC decided to "outsource" its human resources needs to Crapita, a move to Belfast was announced for the whole department. It has turned into a shambles.

According to the Beeb's in-house mag *Ariel*, none of the staff have opted to move "from the Media Centre to Northern Ireland to continue working on the BBC contract". They prefer to take redundancy instead.

BBC staff complain that they have received "no encouragement to go to Belfast nor support in securing equivalent jobs at Capita". Crapita now has to recruit HR advisers from outside the BBC to make up the numbers, if it is to avoid yet another disaster.

MEANWHILE the BBC promised millions of pounds in savings from outsourcing its "health solutions" to Crapita.

Staff who, for example, might have contracted post-traumatic stress disorder after a long stint reporting from the 'stan or Iraq, would once have been assessed by the BBC's in-house trauma team before being referred to their GPs. Now staff with this potentially serious psychological problem have to visit an "outsourced" Crapita Health Solutions centre for assessment before being referred for treatment right back to … the BBC's in-house trauma team.



GOING LIVE

LIVE on Sky News there's an "in depth" interview with the Ethiopian Ambassador to London, Berhanu Kebede, about the location of those British hostages: "I know you can't tell us definitely, but what is your best guess?"

MODESTY BLAISE

"I'm one of the greatest radio DJs ever. Along with Jonathan Ross, Chris Evans and Terry Wogan. the one thing we all have in common is that we're all great storytellers who make a listener feel that we're talking only to them. We all have the ability to keep people listening longer than they intended to. That's the secret of great radio."

– Chris Moyles , *Mail on Sunday Magazine*

JUST FANCY THAT!

20 February. ITV evening news wins News Programme of the Year honour at Royal Television Society annual awards.

25 February. Ofcom censures ITV evening news for inaccurate reporting after broadcasting "as fact its interpretation of the interview Tony Blair gave the Parkinson show [in March 2006], when the interview was, at the very least, ambiguous and open to a number of differing interpretations". ITV admits it was "wrong".

WHAT has happened to the Alistair Cooke Memorial Lecture?

The inaugural lecture, broadcast on Radio 4 and the BBC World Service, took place on 4 July 2005 with much fanfare in front of a specially invited audience at the headquarters of the English-Speaking Union. It was given by Senator John McCain, who has recently announced that he is standing again as a Republican candidate for president, and was introduced by Cooke's biographer, the late Nick Clarke.

Rumours abounded in the BBC that the second lecture, in 2006, would be given by the American broadcaster Garrison Keillor, author of the Lake Wobegon stories and host of the cult weekly radio show *A Prairie Home Companion.* But nothing happened.

Now almost two years have elapsed and the BBC has given no indication that the Alistair Cooke Memorial Lecture will continue. Shoddy treatment, surely, for the family of one of its greatest broadcasters, who have recently suffered the additional trauma of learning that Cooke's bones were stolen and sold after his death by a gang of body-snatchers. His *Letter From America* ran for 58 years, in 2,869 instalments; his lecture seems to have been quietly dropped after just one broadcast.

LAST WEEK's Question Time ended with a resounding attack on premium rate phone-in shows – as panellists agreed that the sooner such programmes were axed, the better.

There followed an on-screen appeal to viewers to phone in or text with their views or requests to be in the audience for future shows, calls costing 25p per minute. David Dimbleby initially claimed that viewers could text for free, and then admitted that, er, they would have to pay 25p; which, he conceded, "seems rather expensive".

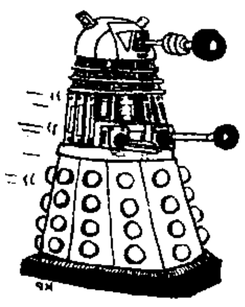
"REVEALED after 55 years," shrieked the *Mail on Sunday* on 4 March over news that footage had emerged of comedian Frankie Howerd making "his debut on ice at a Hollywood party".

"This comical scene is from grainy home movie footage taken in 1952 which has just been found behind a false wall at the late star's £1m Tudor home in Somerset," the paper reported. "Footage will be shown to fans who make a pilgrimage to the house, to mark what would have been Frankie's 90th birthday next month."

Alternatively, they could just watch the footage on the Pathé News website (www.britishpathe.com), since it has been freely available in the company's archives since 1953, complete with a commentary which makes it clear that the ice rink in question is not in Hollywood but on the stage of the Hippodrome club in London.

Pathé is owned by… the Daily Mail and General Trust Group, publishers of the *Mail on Sunday.*

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



"What IP-delivered TV should be about are the things that traditional television struggles at: Amplification, global distribution, rediscovery, engagement, collaboration, innovation and navigation. Put together, this is BBC 2.0….

"The BBC Trust's provisional conclusions into the BBC's new on–demand proposals require that 'the BBC Executive adopt a platform-agnostic approach within a reasonable time-frame' to the seven-day catch-up service on the internet. We agree that an open approach is sensible… Engagement is not for many broadcasters their strong card, and yet one of the most powerful potential features of IPTV. In the future, we'll not be able to rely on schedules to hammock audiences from one programme to the next."

– Extracts from speech by Ashley Highfield, director of New Media and Technology, BBC

HOW NEWS WORKS

"LIVE now to Mike Sergeant who is at a Tesco garage in West London" for the latest on the tainted fuel story (BBC News 24). Sergeant is standing in front of the supermarket petrol pumps.

Moments later, over on Sky News, it's live to Rose Gretton, "joining us now from a Tesco in West London". Not only is it the same Tesco, but the Sky camera is set up on precisely the same spot.

Back on News 24, there's a live interview with Ray Holloway from the Petrol Retailers Association. Moments later on Sky, there's a live interview with … Ray Holloway!

AD NAUSEAM

IT'S BEEN a great few weeks in advertising for fight fans. In the red corner the Bearded Beauty, in the blue the Dirty Digger. One is undisputed king of marketing, who turns a sow's ear into a silk purse with the merest swish of his Bransonian branding wand; the other is the Antipodean slugger, who likes to pummel rather than beguile the British public into submission.

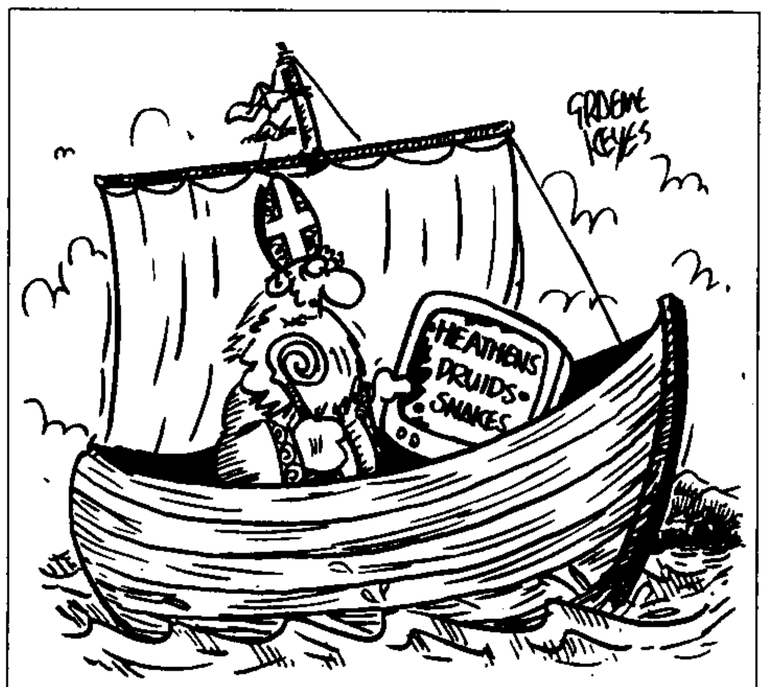
With both PR departments briefing like fury, trying to unravel exactly who's done what in the row over programme pricing is a battle in itself. What's unusual is that the whole spat has been played out in public: Sky ran ads on its channels warning viewers of Virgin's negotiating tactics, Virgin responded in the national press, and latterly Sky has indeed pulled its channels from Virgin's platform. A day later Sky was running ads telling viewers it could get programmes like *Lost* and *24* back (no mention of any of Sky's home-grown offerings) if they only switched.

Tellingly, James Murdoch claimed last week that he had two alternative poster campaigns ready to go, depending on whether or not Virgin paid up. This means that an entire poster campaign must have been dumped, which gives you some idea of how much money is being wasted on this tiresome spat.

EVER since tobacco advertising was banned in 2003, it seemed likely that booze would be next *(Eyes Passim).*

To an extent, concern over junk food advertising has intervened, but just as with tobacco and junk food, you know a ban is in the offing when the main offenders start pre-empting it. So it is with alcohol.

A fortnight ago, the Royal College of Physicians called for a complete ban on alcohol and sports sponsorship. Lo and behold, four days later a consortium of eight of the biggest booze companies – including Diageo, Scottish & Newcastle, Carlsberg and InBev – proudly announced that they were backing a £12m marketing campaign to promote responsible drinking. This may seem commendably magnanimous – until you learn that their combined advertising spend to promote drinking each year is £110m.



St. Pat Nav

DUMB BRITAIN

Big Game TV quiz, Ftn

Host: We're looking for 'Films with an Animal in the Title' – like Spiderman or Catwoman.

Caller: Lassie.

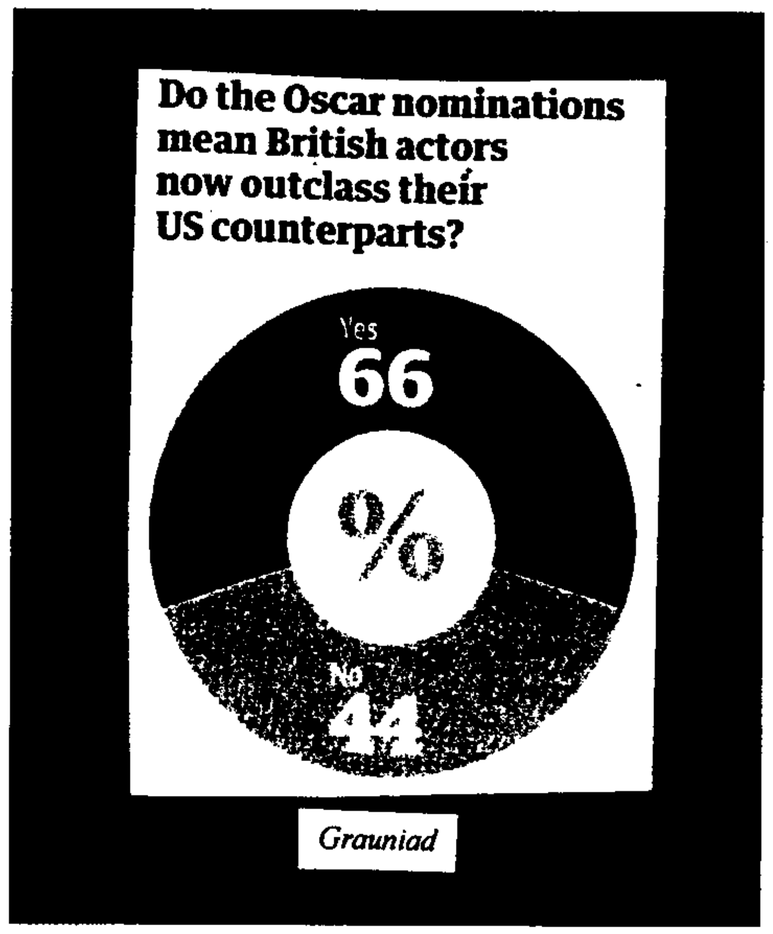
Host: Sorry, no, that was the animal's name, it's not actually a title that includes the name of an animal, is it? Next caller.

2nd Caller: Free Willy.

Host: No, sorry, you've done the same thing. We want a film with the name of an animal in it, not a film that's an animal's name. Next caller.

3rd Caller: Bambi.

Host: No, that's not the name of the animal, it's the animal's name. Do you see? Because in that film, Bambi was the name of the dog.



IN THE THEATRE

THE *Daily Mail* coyly alluded last week to the bad language used in Roy Williams's anti-war play *Days of Significance*, which was premiered recently by the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford.

The *Eye* can now brings you those statistics in full. Williams's work, developed with the help of public subsidies, contains the following: 81 uses of "fuck" or "fucking", 14 "cunts", 13 "arses", 13 "slag/slappers", 12 "cocks", 11 "shits", 10 "dicks", six "pussies", five "wanks", five "bollocks" (an odd number but there we are), four "bastards", three "tits", two "farts", two "skank-faced bitches", and a monastically singular "toss".

Stratford audiences may not be used to this sort of thing but the RSC's chairman Christopher Bland probably is. He used to work at the BBC.

WEST End producer Bill Kenwright, long regarded with suspicion by theatre critics for his self-important habit of telephoning Fleet Street editors to tell them "your critic's useless", spotted a stout, grey-haired gentleman at the recent opening of *The Glass Menagerie.*

"Who the hell's that?" he urgently asked a neighbour. The neighbour told Kenwright that the fellow was veteran hack Paul Callan, who has recently become theatre critic of the *Daily Express*.

Seconds later the appalling Kenwright was all over Callan, gushing: "Paul! How wonderful! Haven't seen you for AGES!"

Medicineballs

Don't carry on doctor

ARE the careers of eight thousand junior doctors being stuffed up on purpose? The rushed implementation of the Modernising Medical Careers (MMC) programme looks like just another New Labour cock-up, but its consequences are suspiciously advantageous to a government intent on busting the medical cabal.

The failure of the Medical Training Application Service (MTAS), a centrally controlled computerised bun fight, was predictable to anyone with a passing knowledge of NHS I.T. programmes (see last *Eye*). It was flawed both in its content, an unvalidated bullshitter's paradise that has allowed erudite disaster zones to get jobs at the expense of much better doctors, and in its delivery. Making so many doctors apply at the same time was bound to lead to persistent crashing of the site, lost applications, interviews offered for specialities not even applied for and interviews at both ends of the country on the same day.

The government has been able to ignore earlier concerns that the new system was unfair and unworkable, safe in the knowledge that doctors are finding it hard to get public sympathy. Greedy GPs and consultants, rather than privatisation, have been cleverly fingered as the prime cause of NHS debt, and junior doctors bleating to the media that they may have to become lawyers, work in the city or move to Australia will have Patsy Hewitt chuckling into her cornflakes. The shit has finally reached the fan, thanks to West Midlands' surgeons suspending their junior appointments, but health minister Lord Hunt was unfazed: "MMC was devised with the help and support of the Royal Colleges, the Academy of Medical Sciences and the BMA." So it's all their fault.

But what's in it for New Labour? Having acknowledged they were stuffed by the BMA over consultant and GP contracts, the government – having increased doctors' numbers – now wants to get by with as few as possible. Doctors have priced themselves out of the market, so medicine is being broken down into simplistic tasks that can be hived off to private companies employing lowest common denominator health workers. Having 30,000 junior doctors compete for 22,000 jobs creates sufficient anxiety and insecurity for those with a job to work illegal hours covering holes in the NHS without whistle-blowing.

Junior doctors aren't going down without a fight but is seems unlikely that enough would resign en masse to panic the government. A more likely scenario is that they'll cancel their memberships of the BMA and royal colleges, a situation that would delight New Labour. The GMC has already been stuffed by Liam Donaldson's ludicrously bureaucratic re-licensing plans, and taking out the rest of the medical establishment would make doctors even easier to control.

The Department of Health has announced a review of MTAS, but not suspended it. Thousands of juniors have joined up as RemedyUK, and are planning "an old-fashioned white coat march" on 17 March from the Royal College of Physicians (11 am) to the Royal College of Surgeons (12.30 pm). Plans for a hideously embarrassing funeral march have thankfully been ditched, but any protest has to explain how their personal misfortune will affect patients.

For the NHS to thrive, it has to ensure the best and brightest doctors are given the right jobs. MTAS doesn't appear capable of ensuring this. When I'm finally dragged kicking and screaming on to an NHS ward, I want to be treated by a doctor with sufficient wisdom, skill and motivation to do the job properly, not a dummed down generic health worker reading from a guideline. Cutting down the supply of good doctors may well balance the NHS books in time to save Hewitt, but the long-term consequences will be dire for patient safety.

M.D.

"The worst thing about being a junior doctor is the long hours out of work"

CHARITY BASH

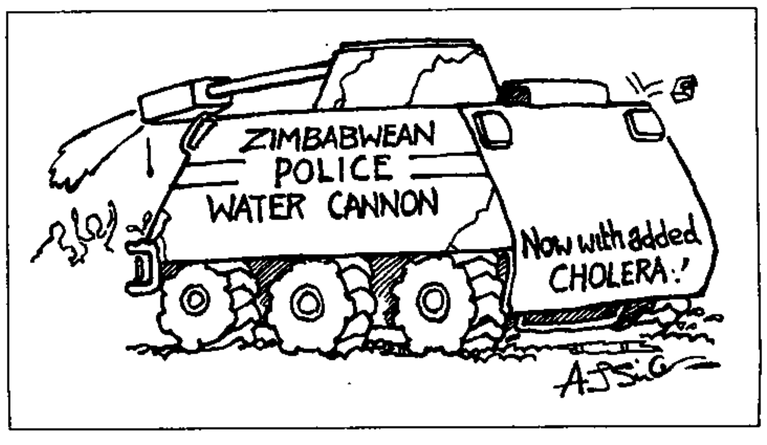
REMEMBER the charity Kids, which decided to charge parents £37.50 a week to use its playgrounds for disabled and able-bodied children last year (*Eye* 1169)? Not surprisingly that move wasn't too successful and, sadly, two of the play facilities are now to close.

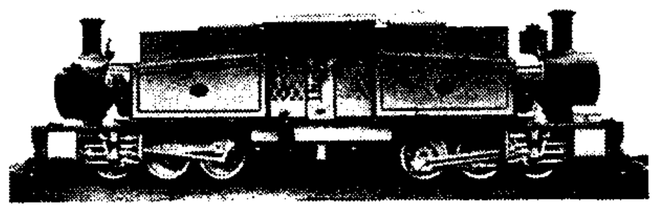
Kids' trustees have decided to shut Charlie Chaplin playground in Lambeth and Michael Williams Palace Adventure Playground in Hammersmith and Fulham due to "uncertainty over financing".

Parents had already expressed concerns over mismanagement of funding for the playgrounds, which used to be a separate charity Kidsactive but merged with a children's respite care organisation to form Kids. The charity certainly spent a lot on fundraising and events (£666,000 in last year's accounts) and has many impressive patrons, but it only managed to raise £1.4m. Although the charity insisted to the *Eye* that it had been given a clean bill of health, in fact a Charity Commission investigation found "issues of concern about fundraising in 2005".

But now that the playground staff are out of a job, more information on the funding situation has come out. One bone of contention last year was a £42,000 donation from Pizza Express specifically to the Charlie Chaplin playground. Workers said they had never seen the money, but the charity insisted it had all been absorbed "to make up running costs".

However, internal budget documents for the Charlie Chaplin playground in 2006/07, seen by the *Eye*, show that nearly all running costs are covered by local authorities paying for the play service, plus grants from organisations such as the Lambeth Children's Fund and Capital Radio. In fact, even if an unexplained £6,767 is deducted from the budget (just in case it was in there in error) and absolutely no money at all came in through voluntary fundraising, the total deficit is just £7,550. Had the Pizza Express money been available to make up running costs, it should have allowed the playground to carry on for years. The Charity Commission told the *Eye* it was looking at the new material to consider what, if any, regulatory action may be required.





SIGNAL FAILURES

ALTHOUGH Network Rail is officially a private company (for the purposes of Treasury deception – *Eyes passim*), its response to the Cumbria accident shows otherwise. Within 72 hours NR had admitted responsibility and apologised unreservedly.

The last time such an admission came soon after a train accident was in the British Rail era. Meanwhile the overarching need to maintain share prices has led rail companies of the genuinely private kind to adopt various tactics to avoid accepting liability. Maintenance contractor Jarvis took nearly two years to admit liability for the 2002 Potters Bar accident, having concocted a sabotage theory to tide it over the period of intense media interest. After the 1999 Paddington crash Railtrack issued a writ against Thames Trains, which issued a writ against Railtrack and, for good measure, another one against the Health and Safety Executive.

NR's response to last month's derailment might look brave and mature, but the cruel truth is that it will steal the bread from the mouths of the poor and needy of the legal profession. No wonder one of them has called for a public inquiry.

● Network Rail chief John Armitt gave a heroic performance for the TV cameras on the day the initial report into the Virgin train derailment in Cumbria pointed to glaring maintenance deficiencies on NR's part.

He had considered resigning, he said, but decided that "this is not a moment for me to abdicate my responsibilities. My responsibility now is to stay with it and to make sure we understand what has happened … to minimise any likelihood of this happening again."

Armitt, due to step down in July, has another good reason for hanging on in there: the annual bonus. The *Sunday Times* reckons he's the highest-paid public employee in Britain, with salary and bonuses approaching £900,000. His deputy and future successor, Iain Coucher, isn't far behind; he pocketed a £315,000 bonus last year. Whopping salaries are no longer enough to motivate executives to do their jobs as best they can, so NR has a bonus scheme which "aligns payments with passengers' interests". Bonuses are based on performance criteria, which evidently don't include ensuring the trains stay on the tracks; for the year of the Potters Bar derailment NR directors shared over £1m in bonuses.

● Richard Branson's response to the initial accident report was to demand more say for train operating companies in NR's maintenance regimes.

It's true that NR sometimes ignores the effects of its actions (especially closing mainlines for maintenance) on passengers and freight customers, but it's unclear what Virgin could teach NR about engineering when Beardie thinks a driver can steer a derailed train "on the stone".

Virgin contracts its train engineering to the companies which built the trains, but did handle maintenance in the early years of Virgin Trains. It cut its wages bill by getting rid of senior (i.e. experienced) employees (*Eye* 944) and blamed its problems on the trains it inherited from British Rail. Many of its diesel trains were grounded during widespread flooding in 2001 while identical trains on other franchises were unaffected (*Eye* 1021). When some of those trains passed from Virgin to Midland Mainline in 2003, they needed extensive mechanical improvement to come up to scratch.

Beardie's most specific advice was that NR's maintenance should be "run on a more local basis". But before the derailment NR sent troubleshooters into Cumbria and Lancashire because of serious concerns about … its local management of maintenance.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

OH NO, JOHN

MORE headaches for Westminster council's disgraced former leader, Shirley Porter, as she tries to enjoy a peaceful retirement at her homes in Israel and Mayfair.

Legal documents lodged with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) last week reveal the extent to which Dame Shirley's financial wellbeing depends on her family's highly unusual investment arrangements with an American defence company, Telos, first revealed in *Eye* 1178. Our story told how the Porter family have controlled Telos, which supplies secure wireless communications software to the U.S. airforce, since 1993. They secretly invested more than $15m (£7.8m) at a time when Dame Shirley was desperate to hide her fortune before she was surcharged over her gerrymandering "homes for votes" scheme at Westminster. In 2004 she cut a deal with the council to pay £12.3m of the £48m she owed the taxpayer in surcharges and interest. The stake in Telos, now worth more than $36m, remained hidden.

Eye 1178 reported on moves by Telos shareholders who own 20 per cent of the company's stock not held privately by the Porters, to force the company to pay nearly $80m in unpaid dividends. On 27 February the investors, led by the "Costa Brava partnership" of Boston, began a fresh round of legal proceedings in Baltimore against Shirley's son John Porter and Telos's chief executive John Wood in an attempt to force them to release the dividends. Costa Brava's writ pulls no punches: "[John] Porter's capital investments in Telos originated from his family, and Porter operates Telos as his own personal checkbook to finance his own living expenses and, secretly, his mother's." It describes what is alleged to be "the looting of Telos" by the Porter family, mainly via an arrangement called "the Porter Note" in which an "exorbitant" rate of interest – up to 17 per cent – is paid on a $12m loan made to Telos by the family in 1995. A clause stipulates that any attempt to bring the arrangement to an end by paying off the loan early would trigger a $13.5m "penalty" payment to Porter – effectively an "egregious... anti-takeover provision" according to Costa Brava. Porter also receives "consulting" fees of up to $260,000 a year, but "Telos refuses to disclose what services Porter [renders] each year in exchange of these considerable sums". Costa Brava wants the court to appoint a receiver to recover millions of dollars in "fraudulent conveyances" paid to Porter, Wood, and other directors and "to take such actions as are necessary to terminate and remedy [the] defendants' *ultra vires*, fraudulent and otherwise illegal acts". Oh dear.

No doubt an amicable solution will be found by m'learned friends. But wouldn't Dame Shirley have done better to keep her money in Tesco shares all along?

● THE THINGS THEY SAY: "Frankly, there is not much ideological difference to the way Conservative Westminster is run from Labour Newham." – Sir Simon Milton, leader of Westminster city council, *Guardian*, 7 March.

STAY AWHILE

TORY Bedfordshire county councillors are at each others' throats over the toxic "Citizen Service Partnership" affair (*Eye* 1179), which has now claimed its first casualty.

Cllr David Lawrence's mistake was to embarrass deputy leader Richard Stay, who chaired BCC's aptly-named "CSP oversight committee" and should have spotted problems with the multi-million IT project that put internet access in, er, a few phone boxes in Dunstable.

Stay's predecessor as deputy – CSP portfolio-holder Paul "Where's" Walley – has vanished while Knacker looks into £8m in accounting "anomalies".

The *Eye* has seen a series of emails exchanged between BCC's near-hysterical Tory councillors. In one Lawrence writes to Stay: "As the portfolio holder the buck stopped with you. I would expect therefore in due course a full statement from you." Stay huffily replies: "Are you expecting me to resign?" prompting a third councillor, Stephen Male, to interject in the style of one of Harry Enfield's Scousers that everyone should "CALM DOWN!"

Questioned about the emails, Stay declared: "I will not be resigning. I sat on the CSP joint committee but the very nature of fraud is that you don't know it is happening..." Pause. "If any fraud occurred, that is."

The day after the email exchange, Cllr Lawrence was told he would be deselected as candidate for the Mid Beds district council division he has served since 2003. Stay, er, stays. For now.

● ONE of the most hotly contested nominations in the annual Rotten Boroughs awards is that of "Tory Bigot of the Year". Staking an early claim for 2007 is 79-year-old Cllr Ted Pateman, who has had to resign from South Cambridgeshire district council after breezily informing colleagues last month that "there are all sorts of wogs here – I don't differentiate between them but treat them all as if they were English". Cllr Pateman explained that he was not being racist. In fact his remark was meant to show what a tolerant sort of place South Cambs is.

KELLY ZEROES

THE government's target of getting all "social" housing up to its own "decent homes standard" by 2010 looks remoter by the day.

At present councils whose tenants vote in favour of keeping the local authority as their landlord are not eligible for the shedloads of money available to those who opt for privatisation.

Despite this, in recent weeks tenants in Brighton, Taunton Deane and Gravesham have all overwhelmingly voted No to having their homes transferred. Crawley council called off its ballot and decided to retain its housing stock after the strength of opposition became clear. In total 124 councils have opted to retain ownership of their housing stock and are calling on the government to make the "fourth option" – of making funds equally available to those who vote against privatisation – a reality.

Local government secretary Ruth Kelly, who patronises council tenants as "in need of help" and "vulnerable", has announced a scheme that would allow tenants to buy as little as a 10 per cent stake in the value of their homes. The current minimum stake under shared-ownership rules is 25 percent. Kelly failed to mention that tenants who opt for 10 per cent "ownership" would be responsible for, er, 100 per cent of any repair bills.

This would help the government achieve its "decent homes" target without having to cough up much more for improvements, because the homes of those buying 10 per cent stakes will be taken out of the reckoning. Brilliant!

PS: Under the existing council housing finance system more than £1.5bn is siphoned out of tenants' rents each year by government to spend as it pleases. Since 1990 a total of £24bn has been trousered in this manner, more than enough to bring the entire stock of council properties up to the decent homes standard – twice.

● IT'S GOOD to see that the Lib-Dem party remains a broad church under the Emperor Ming. In Liverpool it has welcomed as a council candidate one Phil Moffat, who not long ago was acting as unofficial mainland spokesman for Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party – just the ticket for a city which has seen its share of sectarian tension over the years. Meanwhile in Lewes, Sussex, Lib-Dem district councillor Marina Pepper, former Page Three girl, white witch and currently the *New Statesman*'s agony aunt, has been giving a local freesheet her views on global warming. It is a Very Bad Thing, concludes Marina, although it does have one advantage. In the unseasonably mild weather, she writes, "I wear no underwear beneath my short cotton skirt." Steady, Ming, steady!

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

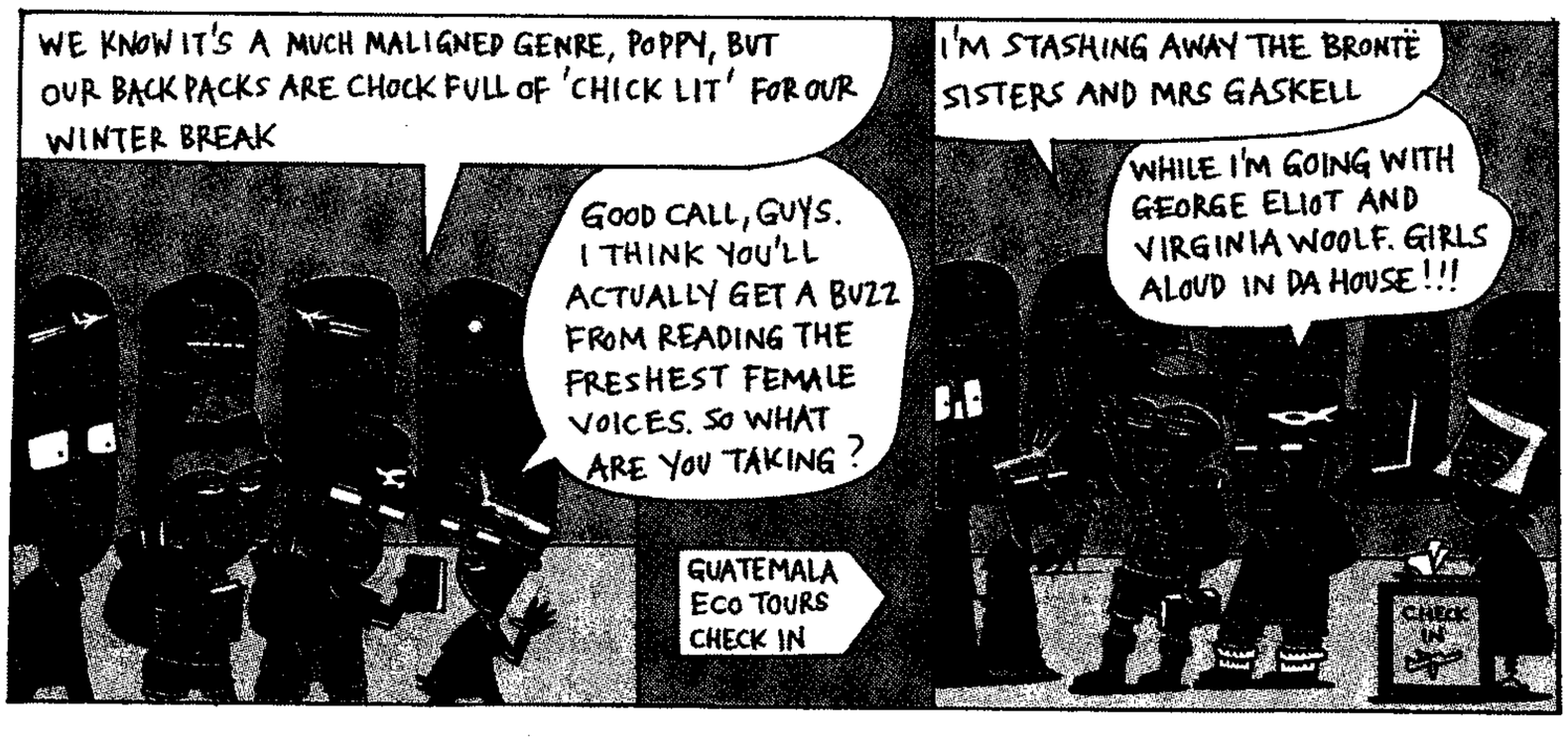
THE sale of school playing fields may be slowing as councils run out of good ones to flog, but they aren't the only sports pitches at risk. Cash-strapped councils own many of the grounds leased to adult sports teams.

One such is Ashington Football Club in Northumberland, whose town centre ground is being flogged off to make way for an Asda superstore. Wansbeck District Council has agreed to sell Portland Park saying that the supermarket will herald "a major injection of impetus to retail trading" in the town. The football club will move to the Hirst Welfare playing fields elsewhere in the town, and given up to £500,000 to create a ground up to Northern League standards. Of course, that will take up a large amount of space at the playing fields.

The club was given little chance to discuss the plans for its future and was presented with a fait accompli in December. But then some of Wansbeck's councillors only found out about the Asda sale from the local papers, as it was put out in a press release before they were told.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


WE KNOW IT'S A MUCH MALIGNED GENRE, POPPY, BUT OUR BACK PACKS ARE CHOCK FULL OF 'CHICK LIT' FOR OUR WINTER BREAK
GOOD CALL, GUYS. I THINK YOU'LL ACTUALLY GET A BUZZ FROM READING THE FRESHEST FEMALE VOICES. SO WHAT ARE YOU TAKING?
GUATEMALA ECO TOURS CHECK IN
I'M STASHING AWAY THE BRONTË SISTERS AND MRS GASKELL
WHILE I'M GOING WITH GEORGE ELIOT AND VIRGINIA WOOLF. GIRLS ALOUD IN DA HOUSE!!!
CHECK IN

NOOKS and CORNERS

POOR old Liverpool is getting ready to be European City of Culture next year – a Eurotitle second only to the Olympic Games for bringing cultural, economic and social catastrophe to any city.

Liverpool city council has used the accolade to encourage an orgy of commercial redevelopment (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*) which has little or nothing to do with the title's intended purpose. And, like Ken Livingstone, this once left-wing city thinks high buildings are cool (for the full horror of what is proposed see www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=218577). The principal development, originally called the Paradise Project but now given the catchy title of "Liverpool One", is a £920m scheme by Grosvenor Estates under construction on the land between the Crown Court and Lord Street and the Albert Dock. This is claimed as Europe's biggest retail scheme. There will also be hotels and luxury flats in the largest gated community in Europe. Lucky Liverpool.

What used to stand here was the Neo-Classical Custom House designed by John Foster. This noble landmark was gutted in the Second World War and subsequently demolished to relieve unemployment – did it not occur to the bone-headed authorities that restoration might have relieved unemployment? Never mind: that is past history. On its site was laid out Chavasse Park. And now, between a new and improved and smaller five-acre park and the Strand, the road by the docks and Pierhead, a 17-storey block with 326 "high specification apartments" is rising. Needless to say, a fashionable foreign firm has been wheeled in to design it – that of Cesar Pelli, the Argentinian-American commercial architect who gave London the Canary Wharf tower. Mr Pelli has designed a "dramatic raking corner feature" and his team of architects "say they have designed an intricate, iconic, curved and glazed building, aimed to be sympathetic to its place among Liverpool's famous waterfront buildings". Well, they would, wouldn't they?

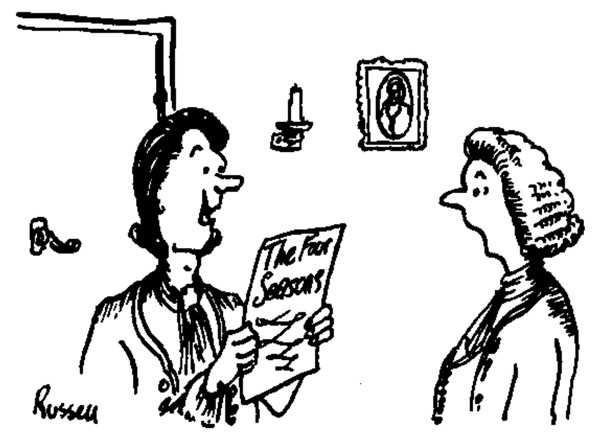
All this is depressing enough, but its name, "One Park West", is a vapid American-style appellation which tells us more than we need to know about Grosvenor Estates and Liverpool. Grosvenor chose the name because the building will overlook Chavasse Park – so why not call it "One Chavasse Park" or "the Chavasse Tower", or whatever? This matters, as Chavasse Park was named after Noel Chavasse, who was not just a local hero but one of the most admirable heroes of the First World War. The son of Bishop Chavasse of Liverpool, Captain Chavasse was in the Royal Army Medical Corps and won the VC and Bar, not for fighting but for tending and rescuing the wounded on the battlefield under fire and regardless of his own safety. He died of his wounds in 1917. If Liverpool, in its Year of Culture, cannot continue to honour Chavasse then it should be ashamed.

AS IT happens, Bishop Chavasse was the man who got the project for a cathedral in Liverpool going, which resulted in Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's stupendous masterpiece. Naturally, this last great Gothic Revival building has to be brought into the 21st century and revamped by 2008 – at a cost of £3m – to attract more visitors. One initiative is "the Great Space", a film theatre providing an interactive and exciting display about the cathedral. Even more essential in a modern religious building is somewhere to eat, and a Mezzanine Café Bar has been created in the north-west transept above the bookshop, on a new steel and glass mezzanine floor designed by the local architects Brock Carmichael, with Mather & Co. as consultants.

Oh dear: it is all a bit reminiscent of the crass new restaurant in the Victoria & Albert Museum (Eye 1178). Liverpool Cathedral now proudly advertises "our newly opened contemporary 'lite bite' café bar where you can meet and eat, and enjoy a brand new view of the cathedral". And, what's more, both visitors and worshippers in the body of the cathedral can enjoy a brand new view of the exciting bright Café Bar. They can also enjoy its noise. Diners on the mezzanine merely have to look over the glass parapet to enjoy the view, for the tall space overhead in the transept flows (with architects space always "flows") into the Great Space beyond. The result is that anyone trying to hear Evensong, say, or pray can have their thoughts concentrated by the cheerful secular sound of rattling cutlery, plates being dropped, diners chatting and children screaming, which echoes all around Sir Giles's great church. It is the same fatuous mistake that that supreme genius Milord Foster made in the new Law Library in Cambridge (Eye 888), forgetting that, unless space is enclosed, sound travels. And modern cafés with their bright, clean hard surfaces are very noisy indeed.

So much for the Great Space being a sacred space. Of course, cathedrals and churches need an income for maintenance and repairs, especially in the absence of serious state funding and with Tessa Jowell squeezing English Heritage to death. Some initiatives, however, seem to defeat their aim by ruining the building or betraying its purpose. But in the 21st century perhaps it is a mistake to think that cathedrals are for religion. They are for the tourist industry and making money, just as – in Liverpool – the European City of Culture accolade is really for commercial development and making money.

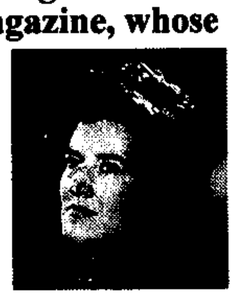
'Piloti'



"Signor Vivaldi is busy at the moment, but your visit is important to him and he has asked me to hum this while you wait"

MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

THE Joyce Hatto affair has brought a time of reckoning for *Gramophone* magazine, whose breathless coverage might have given the impression it had itself discovered the fraud.



Not so, indeed *Gramophone* was largely responsible for propagating the myth in the first place. Its sharp-eared critics did not detect stylistic difference in the many pianists' readings being passed off as Hatto's, and were prepared to believe that an elderly woman racked with cancer was still able to turn out 119 world-class CDs in almost every genre of repertoire.

Serious listeners were questioning Hatto's discs a year ago while *Gramophone* kept churning out the eulogies – inviting readers in successive reviews to "celebrate an awe-inspiring triumph of mind over matter", to be astonished by the "warmth, affection, ease, humanity, scale and command" of her "gloriously responsive" performances. "Listen and wonder" trumpeted its critics, to "a discography that in quantity, musical range and consistent quality [oh yes?] has been equalled by few pianists in history". The fraud was finally uncovered by a financial analyst in New York – following which *Gramophone* initiated a few late-in-the-day tests of its own and a frantic damage-limitation exercise.

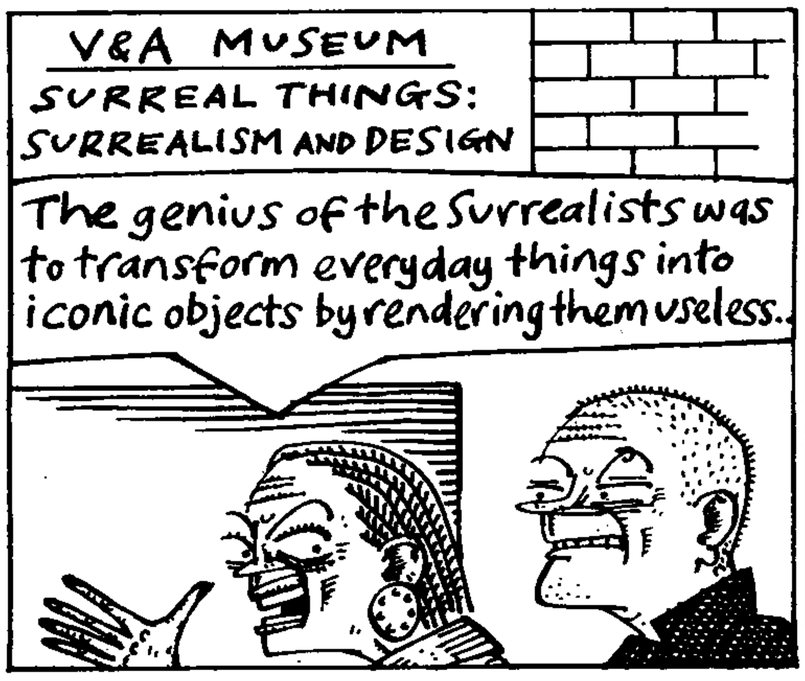
But no one should have been surprised. The man behind this creative enterprise, Hatto's 76-year-old husband Mr W. Barrington-Coupe, has form. In the 1960s his Delta label regularly issued strange recordings composed of radio broadcasts or discs he had copied behind the iron curtain and interwoven to disguise the players. On a notable record of Tchaikovsky's 4th Symphony, he cocked it up by sticking in a dozen bars or so backwards. The "Danzig Philharmonic" recording was in stereo, when everyone knew that Danzig ceased to exist a decade or more before stereo became commonplace. He also made up the artists' names: the conductor was identified as one Wilhelm Havagess.

Towards the end of the 1960s, Barrington-Coupe tried to record the Messiah on the cheap at a church in Kilburn. Halfway through the process someone lifted an iron plate in the churchyard and dumped two tons of coal on the recording crew in the crypt. He eventually got his comeuppance when he took over a pressing plant in Manchester for a week to produce thousands of discs, forgetting to pay purchase tax. He went to prison, his label Saga went bust and the Official Receiver declared that Barrington-Coupe was chiefly responsible for the company's demise.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


V&A MUSEUM
SURREAL THINGS:
SURREALISM AND DESIGN
The genius of the Surrealists was to transform everyday things into iconic objects by rendering them useless..
... and now worth a fortune.
We owe them a huge debt.
MAN RAY
IRON
MERET OPPENHEIM
FUR CUP

I-SPY

London SE1

Submitted by Laurence Fisher.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

(SAE required for return of photographs)

PLAYING THE GAMES

AS THE government scratches around for cash to pay rising Olympic costs, chances are that the Great British taxpayer will be asked to stump up a fair bit. Odd, then, that the man who was instrumental in bringing the Games to London, bid chief executive Sir Keith Mills, should have a less than public-spirited approach to paying his dues.

Accounts for the company through which the bid was organised, London 2012 Ltd, reveal that Mills' £200,000 salary didn't go through the payroll with PAYE deducted as might have been expected. Instead, a company called KEM Management Ltd, which describes its business as "consultancy services", was paid for his and his PA's services. This company was used by Mills to collect income not just from the Olympics job but also his involvement in the Nectar loyalty card business he created. After some hefty "administrative expenses", in the year to April 2005 it paid just £4,073 in tax on income of £623,000.

It's not as if Mills, duly knighted for his Olympic efforts and now deputy chairman of the 2012 organising committee, is struggling. A few weeks ago he modestly confided to the *Daily Telegraph*: "I've got a lot of money. I've got a fantastic project in 2012. I've got a great business. I own the Hugo Boss Yacht Racing team. I sit on the board at Tottenham."

ANOTHER well-connected sports official doing well out of the Games is 1972 Olympic medalist Alan Pascoe, who was vice-chairman of bid company London 2012 Ltd.

For a day job Pascoe runs a sports company called Fast Track Sales Ltd, which received £175,000 from, er, London 2012 Ltd for providing "two members of staff on secondment to the bid company, and also … strategic commercial and marketing advice". Nice work.

WHEN the Olympic Development Agency unveiled its plans for the post-Olympic velopark last month, London's mountain bikers looked on in horror.

Last year cyclists were forced out of the superb and popular Eastway cycle circuit in the Lee Valley – which had facilities for road-racing and bmx-ing plus 6km of mountain bike trails – to make way for the Olympic Park (*Eye* 1173). They were promised new facilities to tide them over to 2012 and a spectacular home for the sport afterwards.

Actually, cyclists have been left with nowhere at all. Eastway was the city's only off-road venue, and even if the proposed Hog Hill cycle track gets planning permission – by no means certain – then it won't open until autumn at the earliest. An interim circuit in the Royal Docks isn't open yet either, despite ODA promises of continuity for the sport.

Worse still, although mountain-bike cross country is an Olympic sport, the post-2012 plans no longer include a legacy for riders from the Games. Earlier drawings, including those shown to the IOC, had included the return of mountain biking to the Lee Valley, but the latest ones don't.

Number crunchings

7% ■ Amount by which costs of Millennium Dome had risen from initial estimate by the time it closed

287% ■ Amount by which costs of London Olympics have already risen – with five years to go

In the Courts

Fayed v. Sanity

"IT WILL have taken a full decade for the grim evidence left in the Pont de l'Alma tunnel, and the testimony of witnesses, to reach a coroner's inquest," declared the *Times* on 3 March. "By any standards, this is lamentable."

But why exactly *has* it taken so long for a British coroner to consider the death of the Princess of Wales?

1997: It is decided that a UK inquest will not take place until the conclusion of the French investigation into the crash.

1999: French investigation concludes that Diana and Dodi died because their driver Henri Paul was drunk. Mohamed Fayed immediately appeals in the French courts against the decision not to prosecute the paparazzi. He also applies to the British High Court for a judicial review of coroner John Burton's decision not to allow him to be represented at Diana's inquest, which will be held separately to Dodi's. Inquest now predicted to start in late 2000.

2000: Having failed to gain representation at Diana's inquest, Fayed seeks judicial review of coroners' decision to hold separate inquests, requesting joint or concurrent ones. Fails.

2001: Appeal against verdict of French investigation is defeated in French High Court. Fayed appeals again. British inquest now not expected for "two to five years".

2002: Michael Burgess replaces John Burton as Coroner for Royal Household, announcing inquest could now be held "next year". "Mr Burgess seems to be taking things forward, which is very much to be welcomed," announces Fayed spokesman.

2003: Burgess announces joint inquest will be held after all. Fayed promptly demands public inquiry.

Burgess points out he is unable to open inquest because "some of these matters are still before the French courts". Civil action by Fayed against photographers in France fails. He appeals. "Sources close to the Fayed family" tell *Daily Express* that "someone with a suspicious mind may say that someone is deliberately trying to delay the inquest".

Burgess invites Fayed legal team to meeting to discuss possible timetable for inquest. Fayed tells *Express* "It was no accident and they do nothing. No inquest, no public inquiry. It is not acceptable."

2004: Burgess opens inquest, requests that Metropolitan Police investigate deaths. "I do not criticise the exercise of whatever rights of appeal there may be, but it may prolong the proceedings in France and result in delays in the French material being made available in England," he points out.

Fayed brings further action in French court of appeal over several aspects of the French investigation. Appeals twice in Scottish courts against decision not to hold public inquiry.

2005: Fayed petitions European Court of Human Rights over aspects of the French investigation.

2006: Fayed appeals in France's Cour de Cassation over decision not to prosecute photographers. This further delays police inquiry, which is already more than a year overdue.

Fayed threatens legal action at High Court and ECHR over jury at inquest, which is required to be made up of officers from royal household. Michael Burgess resigns and is replaced by Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss.

Lord Stevens announces his report will be ready in December. Fayed threatens to seek judicial review to delay publication, insisting he should see it first.

Butler-Sloss announces preliminary hearings for inquest will be held in January. Fayed threatens to seek judicial review to prevent them being held in private. She agrees to open them to public.

"The British public faces an agonising wait of up to two years before the full inquest into the death of Princess Diana is heard," announces Fayed's favourite newspaper, the *Express*. "But last night a source close to the inquiry said: 'Two years is too long for something that has dragged on and on. We want answers now – and we want the truth.'"

2007: Preliminary hearings open in January. Having rejected Stevens's 832-page report as a "cover-up", Fayed threatens judicial inquiry unless he receives transcripts of all the interviews he conducted.

It is announced that the inquests will open in May and be held jointly, as requested by Fayed way back in 2000. "Lady Butler-Sloss's most recent decision clearly continues the Establishment policy of cover-up," declares Fayed. "They treat them both as if they were part of the royal household, just to stop the truth emerging."

She also announces that there will be no jury of royal officers after all. Fayed demands judicial review of this decision.

Having succeeded in persuading the High Court to force Lady Butler-Sloss to use a jury of the public at the inquest, Fayed's legal team last week turned up to the second preliminary hearing and promptly demanded… a further six months delay. "I am trying to keep this inquest moving; I am finding it extraordinarily difficult to find anyone else who will move it with me," observed Lady Butler-Sloss.

The inquest is now due to begin in October 2007. As Richard Keen QC, representing the family of Henri Paul, noted, the photographers who witnessed the crash may be more willing to give evidence given that under French law, criminal charges must be brought within ten years.

It will also mean there can be no culpability of the Fayed employees who put the couple in the charge of a drunk driver with no back-up vehicle. What an extraordinary coincidence!

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

MODEL AGENCY
…AND IF YOUR DAUGHTER SIGNS TO US, THERE'LL BE SO MUCH POTENTIAL FOR HER TO TRAVEL!
THEY'VE GOT REHABS ALL OVER THE WORLD!!!
WOW!!!
GOSH…. HOW EXCITING!

Letters

Hospital pass

Sir,

Great reporting on the wonders of IT land in the NHS – I'm sure all those made redundant in recent months from the various Trusts will be pleased to see the cash formerly used as part of their pay cheques put to such good, efficient use.

As a public sector employee myself, it's good to see such incompetence, arrogance and general fuckwittery exposed at a time when Gordon and Tony are dishing out such generous pay rises to us all.

More power to your proud organ.

SAM JOHNSTON,

Ivybridge, Devon.

Botch the birdie

Sir,

The Bernard Matthews label on his meat products features Wychingham Hall in Norfolk. When Bernard bought the hall it was almost derelict and he reared turkeys in the downstairs front rooms while he saved money to build his first purpose-built turkey house. So there is a resemblance between label and actuality – albeit spiritual!

JOHN BOLT,

London E8.

Sir,

After reading that Bernard Matthews is likely to receive up to £600,000 in compensation for bringing bird flu into this country, I thought you might be interested in the attached, which follows on from your picture in Eye 1178.

Yours faithfully,
CHRIS HEASMAN,
Isle of Wight.

Bad apple

Sir,

Ad Nauseam, Eye 1179. It is generally acknowledged that Apple's adverts are created for the sole purpose of enabling Steve Jobs to wind up Bill Gates.

Regards,
MAT HUBBARD,

Via email.

Missed the point

Sir,

Crass, jejeune, heartless, tasteless, odious, twisted – and totally unfair! I mean the 'Harry! Harry!' cover. Surely it's praiseworthy that Prince Harry has joined the Army and has insisted on equal treatment with regard to deployment to Iraq.

There is no suggestion that there will be an early return of the Blues and Royals. And any war zone is dangerous from the moment troops enter it.

Is there now a surfeit of cold, world-weary smugness in Carlisle Street?

Over and out,

RODERICK THOMSON,

Ilkley, W. Yorks.

Sir,

Having been a subscriber to your mag for some time and an admirer of a lot of the sentiments that you print, I was surprised at the front page of the 2 March copy, which suggests that Prince Harry is going out to Iraq purely as a publicity stunt and in no way to serve his country. This I think does the young man grave injustice, as right from the start he has said that he wanted to go and serve in Iraq.

He cannot help the fact that he was born into Royalty any more than you or I can help the society into which we were brought into this world. Having joined the army he could, because of his position, have stayed at home, like some, and in time become colonel in chief of some regiment and turned up on the Queen's Birthday, the Trooping of the Colour or Armistice Day with lots of ribbons on his chest which would have meant nothing, instead he is going to earn any campaign or other medals he may get.

The unfortunate thing is that if he became a casualty like some of our lads out there, it would have been in a war that nobody wanted except the people that put us there in the first place. I would expect that if that happened then Private Eye would have the guts to print an apology, or would they?

At least the Second World War that I took part in was justified, and the lives that were lost, including my two brothers' (and my own as an RAF pilot that on several occasions I nearly lost), was not in vain – or was it, and at 85 years of age, I sometimes wonder.

Regards,
A.S. HARPER,

Warley, W. Midlands.

Sir,

Re: Cover of Issue 1179.

Come on chaps – you can't have it both ways. You keep telling us how far Iraq is from any kind of peace, and no one's convinced by the government's stated intention of withdrawing British troops; yet you criticise Prince Harry for turning up just in time for the end of the show! I don't know how long he'll be there but I do believe that he is going out of a true sense of duty and patriotism, and I respect him for it.

I for one would hesitate before marching into a war zone (with or without personal bodyguards) and I respect him for stepping up to the mark for grandma and country.

Regards,
NIGEL SMITH,

Reading.

Heir-brained

Sir,

The "I'm going to get slaughtered" cartoon (Eye 1179) is about as far from funny as you could have managed.

Yours faithfully,
SIMON OLLERENSHAW,

Greenwich, Conn., USA.

Scenes You Seldom See

"Please get back to me on 0771 555 111888. I'll repeat that again slowly, so you can take it down. It is 0771..."

Sick humour

Sir,

Issue 1179 contained at least five references to mental illness, all of them perpetuating pre-Victorian misunderstandings of the issues. There are no jokes about other diseases - perhaps mental illness is funnier than breast cancer?

Moreover, references to the "loony-right", Peter "Mentally" Hill and Peter "Bonkers" Hitchens suggest we who suffer from mental illness are dangerously megalomaniacal.

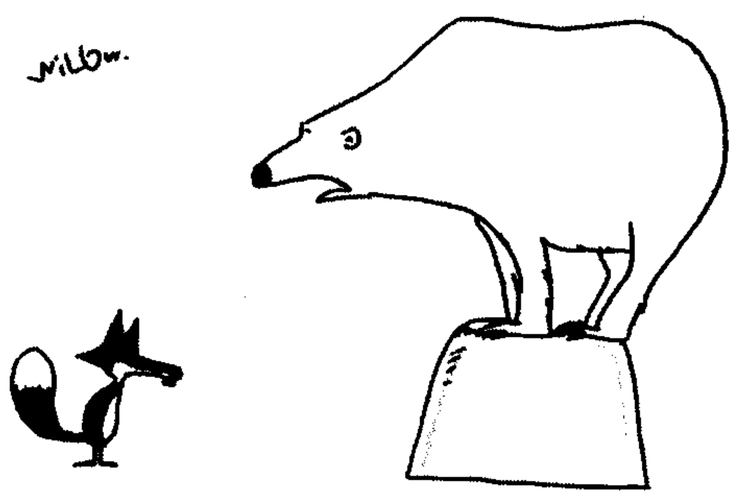
Nor is it true that right-wingers such as Hitchens are necessarily suffering from a mental illness. He is not. His personality might be intensely dislikable, his politics irrational and his rantings and ravings may point to sub-conscious insecurities, but he is not mentally ill. He is well-educated and has a healthy brain. He just chooses to use it to propagate hatred, mis-information and prejudice.

That is what is shameful about him and his ilk.

Many of us suffer from real health problems, please don't make them worse by associating us with the likes of Hitchens.

Yours,
MARTIN PARKER,

Via email.



"No, it's not a Glacier Mint – it's all that's left of the polar ice cap"

Alone Attallah-st!

Sir,

*As the former ghost of man of letters Naim Attallah, I feel I must defend him against the scurrilous suggestion (Books & Bookmen, Eye 1178) that he appointed, with indecent haste, a spectral replacement – to wit, "another ghostly little helper". Peter Ford is a fine editor, and his skills have indeed been conspicuous in the Attallah **oeuvre** since my own departure to the ghost graveyard. However, close textual analysis leaves me in no doubt that quite apart from being his own publisher, publicist and public relations person – an extraordinary achievement in itself – Mr Attallah is now in all meaningful senses the writer as well as the author of his own books. I trust this helps clear up any confusion.*

Yours truly,
JENNIE ERDAL,

St Andrews, Fife.

Half Marx

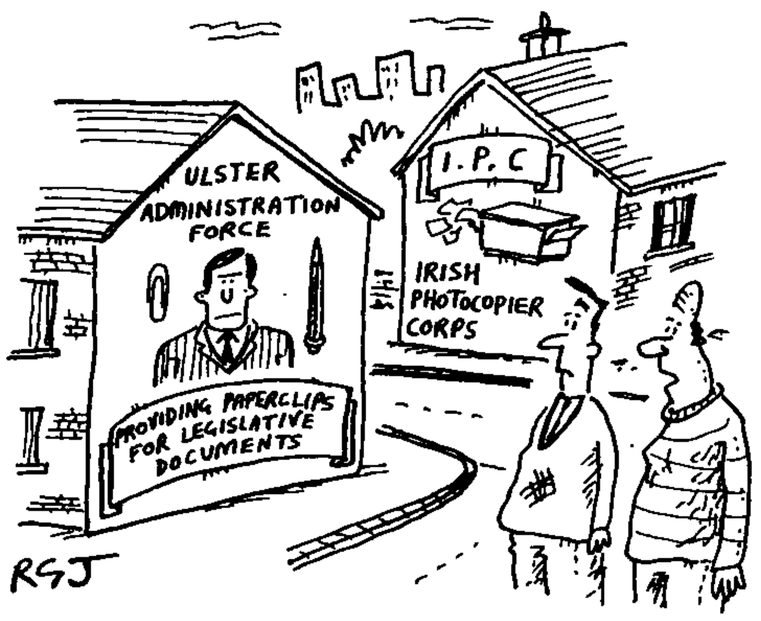
Sir,

Your recollection of the heroic actions of the Federation of Conservative Students in your last issue (Eye 1179 , p6) makes the mistake of joining the story halfway through.

It was the hard Left factions within the NUS in the 1980s who were the enemies of reasoned student debate. Their policy of "no platform for racists and fascists" basically meant that anyone vaguely to the right of Karl Marx would automatically be denied a hearing, and woe betide anyone who tried to make themselves heard over the barracking and abuse. We in the FCS were merely meeting like with like.

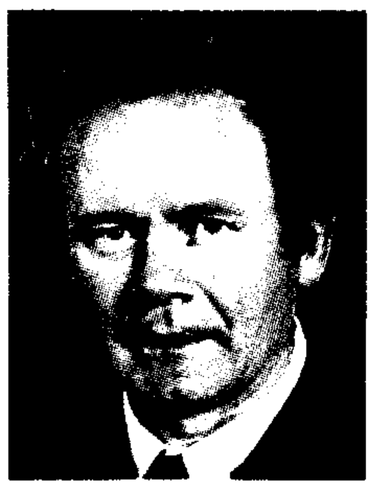
The Left knew it was in terminal decline, we just hurried them up a bit. They were fine days to be a Tory student!

Yours sincerely,
DR GREG SPENCER,
Kingswinford, W. Midlands.

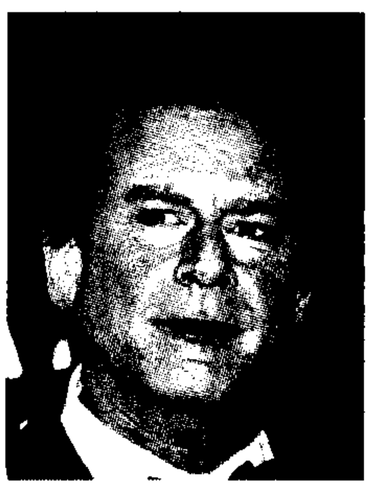


"Things have changed round here since the paramilitaries committed to supporting regional government"

Lookalike



Garfunkel



McGuinness

Sir,

Have any of your readers noticed the amazing resemblance between Martin McGuinness and Art Garfunkel? Could they by any chance be related? I think we should be told.

Yours sincerely,
SEÁN MCARDLE,
Cork.

SOLUTIONS

"Temporary accommodation solutions provided by Portakabin" – *portakabins*

"3G Seafood Solutions has a passion to please" – *seafood*

"Emco offer a total solution to your corporate entrance matting requirements" – *doormats*

"Staples – Black stitched leather look storage solutions" – *boxes*

"Oxford Airport: Air Transport Solutions for Oxfordshire" – *planes*

"Warner's Outdoor Solutions, Inc. is your seeding/sodding solution" – *lawn care*

All submitted by readers

Sex chore-tle

Sir,

I think that the funniest humour is the kind that you can relate to.

I've been married (happily) for 36 years and, bearing this in mind, found the cartoon on page 32 of your latest mag very funny. (It's the one about sex being a chore.)

All the best,
PETER RAYNES,
Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

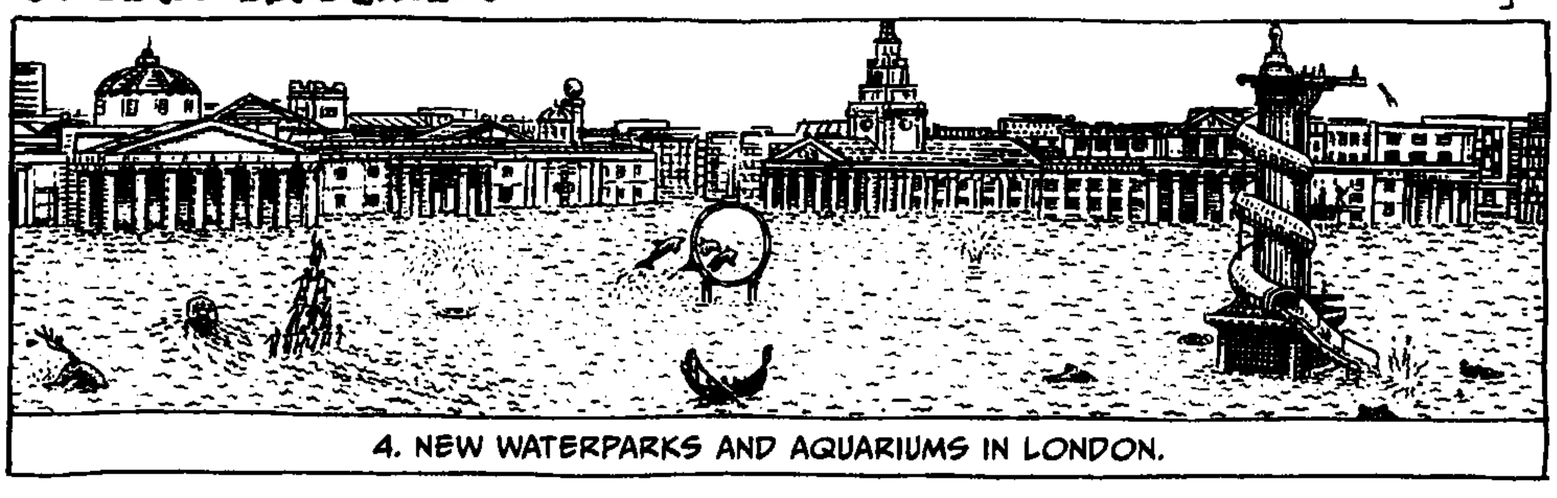
"He [the PSV centre half] is like the Tower of Babel in there."
MARK LAWRENSON
(Martin Macari)

"He [Farrell] is made of steel and has the broken nose to prove it."
SONIA MacLOUGHLAN, BBC1
(Ian Russell)

"Prince Harry will be the first member of the Royal Family to serve in Iraq since his uncle Prince Andrew fought in the Falklands in 1982."
Newsreader, Radio 5 Live
(Michael Charalambous)

"Kelly [Sotherton] has the whole crowd here and literally running the 800 metres with her."
COLIN JACKSON, BBC2
(Brad Ingram)

"It's a local derby almost every time these two teams meet."
GERRY ARMSTRONG, Sky Sports
(Keith Prior)



"We appreciate your efforts to be religious, but there's still no room at the school"

Pedants Corner

Sir,

Whilst agreeing with Remote Controller that ITV's pisspoor Primeval is another clone, I would suggest that it is much closer in concept (things slipping through a rip in time or space) to the Dr Who spin-off Torchwood (but without the sex and violence). A pity it isn't as close in other ways, such as quality of scripts, standards of acting, etc.

Yours faithfully,
ANDREW CURTIS,

... To outpedant Mr Jonathan Swale, it is rather inaccurate to describe a yogh (as it is normally written) as a medieval 'y'. In fact it is a medieval cursive form of the letter 'g', which was frequently pronounced as a 'y' in Old English. Because of its resemblance to the cursive letter 'z', they were frequently confused, and eventually merged in Scotland. This is, by the way, the reason that the name 'Menzies' is pronounced 'Mingis".

JOHN JOSEPH PERRY.

... Dr Andrew Sawczenko is both right and wrong. St Olave's Grammar School is indeed in the postal town of Orpington – it is also in the educational Borough of Bromley. I have reason to know!

SUE JOHNSON (Regional Official for Bromley [and other areas] Association of Teachers and Lecturers).

*... There was not a train crash in the Lake District as reported in Street of Shame (Eye 1179); however, there **was** a crash in another part of Cumbria near Grayrigg.*

You should get out of the South more.

PETER TANFIELD.

... Can I please submit the following letter to Pedants' Corner?

"As the Creator of the species known as Orcs (in the Westron tongue) or Uruk (in the Black Speech) or Orch (in Sindarin), may I clarify their origins and development to the confused readers of your Pedants' Corner?

"In the First Age of Middle Earth I enslaved large numbers of Elves, who had been created by those feeble deities with whom I was then in conflict. I corrupted, tormented and mutilated the Elves and transformed them into Orcs (in every aspect the precise opposite of Elves) in mockery of those spineless Gods who then defeated and banished me.

"In later Ages (and in my absence) my underlings Sauron and Saruman developed (through cross-breeding with Men) ever more vicious varieties of Orc, such as the Uruk-Hai and Jade Goody.

"Although I have been banished outside the Walls of the World for countless aeons by craven, lesser Gods, my hordes of Orcs, Balrogs, Wargs, Goodys and fell beasts of air, land and sea yet await my imminent return to Middle Earth! I have spoken!

"The Lord Melkor aka Morgoth (aged 78,724): The Once and Future Master of Middle Earth."

PAUL SEEDHOUSE.

Letter from **Afghanistan**

from Our Own Correspondent

IT IS going to be a long, hot spring and summer for us in Afghanistan – or so we are assured by Nato and the Taliban. Both sides say they will launch offensives and both insist they will be victorious.

Our only certainty is that this will not be the last of the fighting: that will continue for years to come. After all, Nato claims to have killed around 2,000 insurgents last year – and we must assume that some at least were Taliban fighters not civilians – but they have been more than replaced from emptied madrassas in Pakistan.

Life here has other certainties. There will be no end to corruption or the opium trade that fuels it. Talk by the US and Britain, and our own government, of tackling these problems draws hollow laughter. It has even been suggested that Hamid Karzai's own brother is one of the country's biggest drug dealers and recognised as such by your diplomats in Kabul. Some in the foreign media have written about these allegations; our own journalists seeking to do the same were warned off with threats of violence.

There will be much talk of reconstruction but little actual activity in the Pashtun south, the most crucial area for lasting peace. The British, who are the "lead nation" down there now, and the Americans produce figures purporting to show that the southern provinces are some of the largest beneficiaries of aid. But this is a sleight of hand. Cash may have been allocated but projects rarely begin because of the security situation. Pashtuns see infrastructure being built elsewhere and some then join the Taliban, thus helping to keep aid projects away. The warlords, meanwhile, continue to flout what passes for law here. After the fall of the Taliban these strongmen did fear losing power. But nothing happened and they reinvented themselves as "political leaders" in the new, democratic Afghanistan – while keeping their weapons and private armies.

It need not have been this way. After our "liberation" you may recall that your Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said that "this time we will not walk away". But then the US and UK did exactly that – into the quagmire of Iraq.

It is because of these lost and wasted years that your government is having to send another 1,400 troops and the Americans another 3,200. The Poles are sending a thousand, and even the French and the Germans are providing extra aircraft. Surely this will enable Nato to beat the Taliban – six years after the official victory. But then again your military commanders hardly seem united. The new American chief of the International Security Assistance Force, General Dan K. McNeill, is scathing about the British decision to make local deals in Helmand – such as at the town of Musa Qala – under which community elders pledge to maintain security in return for foreign troops pulling out. The Americans hold that these "elders" are nothing more than the Taliban in disguise. The weekend General McNeill took over from the British General David Richards, the Musa Qala pact fell apart and Taliban fighters took over the town. Such is the mutual suspicion among the "shoulder to shoulder" allies that some in the British military believe the CIA played a part in engineering the Musa Qala debacle. This is not the first time they have accused the Americans of underhand tricks. The sacking of Mohammed Daoud, governor of Helmand and a British protégé, by President Karzai is also blamed on the State Department and the CIA.

But maybe it won't be all doom and gloom. Your esteemed Prime Minister, we are told, wants Afghanistan as his legacy (Allah knows he cannot have Iraq). Foreign Office and DfID officials will, we hear, pour into Lashkar Gar and the embassy in Kabul is being expanded. So we look forward to what this renewed "investment" will bring. But please do excuse us if we don't hold our breath.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "A modest payment is offered for taking part in the test," declared Ali Carnegie of the LoveHoney.co.uk sex toy retailer in a press release, "but this is really a job that people should do for love, rather than for money. For years, women have been complaining about the taste of male ejaculate, but no remedy has ever been found. But now we think we may have finally solved the problem. That's why the company is searching for sexually active couples who will be prepared to test a new 'one a day' pill, designed to change the taste of semen by masking the traditional Brie odour and salty taste with a refreshing apple-like flavour and bouquet.

"Successful applicants will need to take the pill regularly for thirty days, and will be expected to use an online blog, to provide a daily blow by blow account of how the taste of their partner's sexual fluid changes. Couples who are interested in the position can apply by competing the Sperm Tester application form on our web site. Both straight and gay couples throughout the world are encouraged to apply, but gay men should apply via our brother site, at www.cocklocker.co.uk. The test product is 100% vegan." *(Linkadelic magazine, 28/6/06. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

– ● –

● *"When we knocked at his front door to arrest Kurt Husfeldt," a spokesman for Suffolk County police told reporters in Lindenhurst, NY, "he was astonished that we'd been able to track him down so quickly. Earlier that night, he'd broken into the Babylon Public Works garage with his accomplice, Steven Mangiapanella, and had seen a boxful of what he thought were cell phones. They had stolen them and driven home with them, thinking that they could sell them. But what they hadn't realised was that the electrical devices weren't cell phones at all, they were fourteen Global Positioning Systems, intended for use in snow plows, dump trucks, street sweepers, and other public vehicles.*

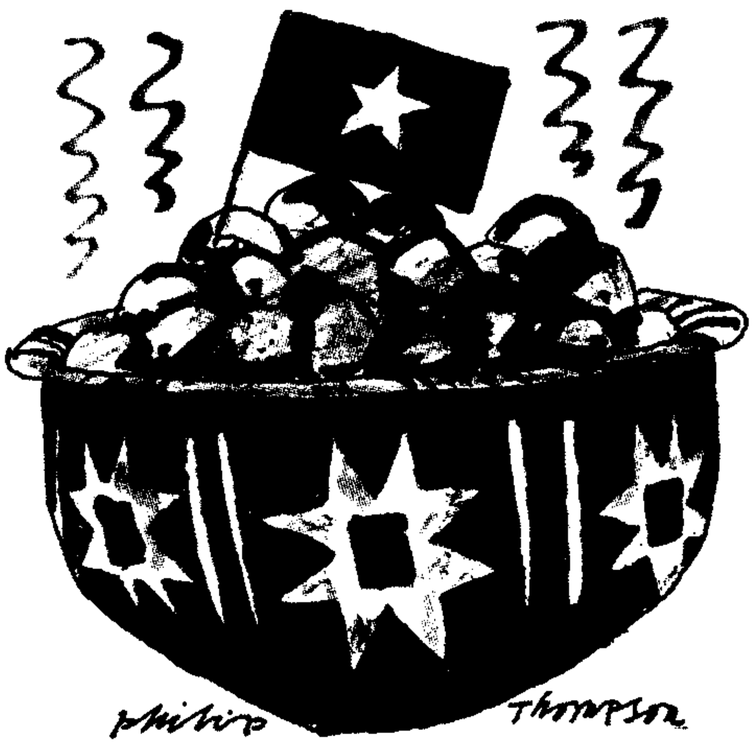
"Even when they got home, they still assumed that the devices they had stolen were cell phones, and they powered one up, to see how it worked. By that time, the robbery had already been reported to us, so all we had to do was to tap into our own town GPS system, and look for signals. The system showed us that one of the devices was being operated inside Husfeldt's house, so we drove over there and arrested him. It was as easy as that."

Husfeldt and Mangiapanella were charged with grand larceny, burglary, and criminal possession of stolen property. Husfeldt's thirteen-year-old son was also arrested on grand larceny charges. (GPS magazine, 9/2/07. Spotter: David Dallison)

– ● –

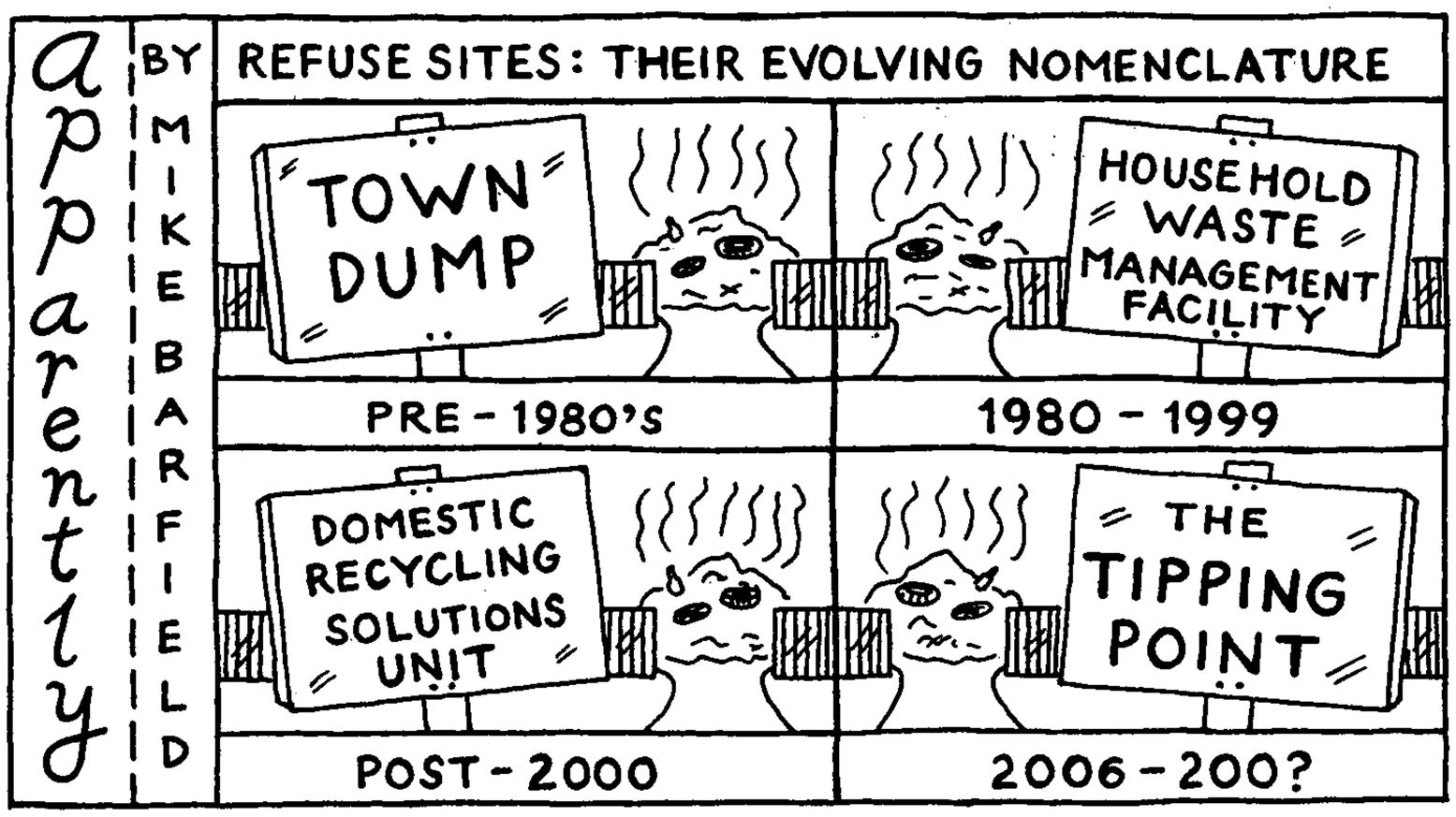
● Welcome to the first POTATO DAYS HANOI. January 18th to 21st at Goethe-Institut Hanoi.

Enjoy and explore with all senses.
See Potato as film star.
Feel The beauty of potato.
Learn About poverty and potato.
Listen To history and potato.
Touch Art and potato.
Taste and Smell Gnocchi, Rosti, Nikujaga, Gratin, chippies and more potato dishes.



Other events include a talk on "The Cultural History of the Potato," an excursion to the potato fields of Nam Dinh, potato arts, potato films, and potato dances.

The Potato Days are part of the Vietnamese-German Potato Promotion Project, implemented in 2000, and aiming to increase the promotion of the potato in Vietnam. *(Announcement in Vietnam News, 15/1/07. Spotter: David Makinson)*



'I'M NO MEDDLER' says Charles

by our Media Staff **Coco Chanel-Four**

AN ANGRY Prince Charles has written to hundreds of influential top names to protest at the suggestion that he spends all his time writing to hundreds of influential top names.

"The idea that I would waste my time writing all these letters about trivial TV programmes," he writes, "is so far short of the truth as to be absurd. As far as I am aware, I am not writing this letter."

TV Highlights

Is Channel Four fit to be a broadcaster?
A DOCUMENTARY presented by Prince Charles asks whether the company responsible for ripping viewers off over phone lines and broadcasting Big Brother is in any position to make judgements about *(cont. channel 94)*

TORY RACE ROW INTENSIFIES

by Our Political Correctness Staff **Michael 'Differently' White**

THE TORY Party was plunged into fresh crisis when leader David Cameron was accused of calling a fellow MP "a racist bastard".

"This is totally unacceptable," said backbench veteran Sir Bufton Tufton, but Cameron defended his comments, saying, "In the modern Tory Party you have to get used to being abused. It's part and parcel of the job. It goes with the territory."

He continued, "I call everyone a racist bastard. It doesn't mean anything. I'm just trying to get some votes."

Army specialists like Peter Oborne, however, came to the defence of the beleaguered Tory leader.

The Black Bastard Watch

"Look, we all know that David isn't prejudiced against his own MPs. It's just part of their training to be sworn at by him. Let's be honest, some MPs are just idle and useless and they need to be given the boot."

■ What do you think? Do you feel you could have written this piece better than our journalist? Or do you want to write about something else? Have your say on www.fillupournewspaper.co.uk

New-Look House Of Lords

You Decide

Which of the following options do you most favour as the way forward to a modernised second chamber?

1. 100% elected
2. 100% appointed
3. 80% elected, 20% grapefruit segments *(Is this right?)*
4. 40% elected, 60% crooks
5. Celebrity House of Lords – You vote them out (Hosted by Davina McCall)
6. 0-60 in 9 seconds
7. Tottenham 3, Chelsea 3
8. 70% viscose, 20% nylon, 10% cotton
9. Nutritional information 475 calories, 20% gluten
10. Lord Archer, sitting on his own

(That's enough Lords. Ed.)

A Private Dentist Writes

AS A private dentist, I am often asked by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, "Dentist, I've got this terrible pain I can't get rid of. What is it?"

Well, the simple answer is that the Chancellor is suffering from what we dentists call *Being Kicked In The Teeth By Your Nextdoor Neighbour* or *Dentalis blairensis normalis*, to give it the full orthodontological term.

What happens is that the patient endures long years of frustration during which he grinds his teeth down to stumps. These are then kicked in by his neighbour, rendering him toothless.

If you are worried about living nextdoor to Tony Blair, you should have thought about it a long time ago.

That will be £6,000, please.
© A Dentist

"Your signature, Mein Führer, it lacks authority"

Nursery Times

Friday, March 16, 2007

CINDERELLA'S SLIPPER FLOWN IN

by Our Royal Staff **Hans Muslim Anderson**

A SLIPPER belonging to the ugly sister *(surely 'the beautiful Duchess'? Ed.)* was today flown thousands of miles in a pumpkin aircraft to the Land of the Arabian Nights after Cindermilla had left it by mistake at the ball.

Prince Charmless instructed four-and-twenty blackbirds to transport the crystal slipper on a velvet cushion to Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Hearts, at a cost of over a hundred chocolate gold coins. When it arrived it was found that the slipper did not fit, as it belonged to the late *(cont. p. 94)*

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hi!

And this week, as part of our Lenten reflections, I would like to share with you my thoughts about the afterlife.

It's a difficult subject, isn't it? I'm sure a lot of you have only a rather hazy picture of what the afterlife might be like.

And there are even quite a few people these days who probably don't believe in an afterlife at all!

But, hey, that says more about them than about the afterlife!

So let me give you my take on what it's going to be like, because, actually, it's something I've been giving rather a lot of thought to lately!

The way I see it, we toil away for years and years in this world, trying to do the right thing, facing all sorts of problems and having to put up with every kind of unfair criticism.

But – and it's a big but – at the end of the road, we can at last lay down our heavy burdens (at a moment of our own choosing!).

And it is at that moment that we at last begin to realise that there is a whole new world waiting for us, incomparably sweeter and more glorious than anything we could have possibly imagined!

Behind us now are all those tribulations of the past: the grumpy and morose nextdoor neighbour who made our life hell with his sulking and his carping; the man in Tesco's who can never find any good in anything I do (no wonder he always used to end up falling into the Fairtrade Kumquat counter!); disloyal colleagues making snide comments behind your back after all you've done for them, by giving them jobs most of them aren't up to!; and worst of all, the sight of PC Yates hovering in the shrubbery, just when I'm trying to get on with writing my sermon.

No wonder in olden times they used to call this "The Vale of Tears".

"Ok then, Vicar," you say, "so what's it going to be like in your so-called afterlife?"

Well, let me paint you a picture!

I see a large, white mansion standing in a leafy square, one of "many mansions", as it says in the Good Book *(Foxton's 1.3)*.

I see a "land of plenty" – a land "beyond the ocean", a "land flowing with milk and money", as we are also promised in the Good Book *(HarperCollins 1.3 billion)*.

It's a happy place! A fun place! A land where the righteous man is at last rewarded for all his "New Labours" down here at the coalface!

But that doesn't mean just anyone can walk into this paradise! It's just me! Because, let's face it, there's a little matter of "judgement" to get past, before you can earn the right to dwell in the "realm of the blessed"! Remember the parable about being separated into the sheep and the scapegoats! Well, I've been judged by what in the end is the only judge that matters – myself!

Not Mr Butler, not Mrs Short, not the senile Chinaman, Mr Campbell, or that silly little boy in his top hat who wanders round the parish pretending to be me!

No, I have looked on my works and thought to myself, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant – you're a pretty straight kind of guy, and always have been!"

So that is why I am looking forward to the afterlife, not with fear, not with cynicism, but with joy and confidence!

Bring it on, as my good friend the Rev. Dubya would say! Mission accomplished!

And I shall follow in the footsteps of that great and good man (who was also my friend!), the Rev. Jefferson Clintstone of the Church of the Seven-Day Fornicators!

I shall tread where he has trod! I shall speak where he has spoken! And I too will be numbered amongst the multitude of the saints!

Anyway, those are just my thoughts, as I sit here in my study, hearing poor Miss Turner sobbing in the corner, having to listen to Mr Levy shouting on the answerphone, "If I go down, you're coming with me", and watching PC Yates standing on his stepladder, waving a pair of handcuffs threateningly at me!

Tony

The Vicar dreams of the afterlife, as seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

Position Sought

Calling all wealthy American businessmen, foundations, publishers, etc!!!

Shortly to retire from prestigious post in UK, a senior spiritual leader is looking for suitably remunerative positions in the US, available within a few months. All offers above $1 million considered.

High on communications skills, problem solving and 'big vision projection', prepared to lecture, advise and take off jacket at conference events.

Has been on 'Richard and Judy', is in excellent health and is in no way mentally unbalanced at all.

Also available: wife of the above, now famous in her own right as one of the leading practitioners in human rights law and on the full range of inter-disciplinary skills involved in being a vicar's wife.

All enquiries in confidence to the vicarage website: www.jobsrus.com

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

Can you imagine for the moment what it is like to be a young, idealistic girl, fresh from university, keen to do her bit to make the world a better place and who then lands what she imagines is the job a lifetime, working at the vicarage, looking after the vicar's emails and working the shredder?! And then she discovers that the people she really looked up to and thought were her friends are, in fact, just a gang of

Yours sincerely,
Mrs Ludmilla Turner (Ruth's mum!),
Watergatekeeper's Lodge,
Pricerite Road.

(Editor's note: Letters from mad women may have to be cut for reasons of space, unlike letters from supporters of the vicar – see below)

Dear Sir,

Your readers may wish to know about an exciting and important new website, www.anyonebutbrown.co.uk, which has been set up by various ex-members of the PCC, including Mr Milburn and Mr Clarke. Our aim, of course, is not in any way to disparage our treasurer Mr Brown, or to suggest that if he took over the parish, it would be an unqualified disaster. On the contrary, our only aim is to promote an open and honest debate about whether Mr Brown is likely to mess it all up because he is so useless!

Peter Mandelson,
Rue des Matelots,
Bruxelles H2J

Lent Talks

The Vicar's wife talks about the parable of the Good Rich Lawyer, named in the Bible as Goldman Zacheus.

Tickets still available
(Pay at the door: £186.50)

Announcement

The vicar writes: The lesson to be read this week at Evensong will be from the Book of Levy – but remember everybody, it's just the lesson, it's not Gospel! T.B.

The Book of Levy

Chapter 94

1. There was, living in that land, a man righteous in the eyes of all, who had been blessed with great wealth.
2. And his name was Levy, son of Levy, which means one who taketh 15 percent (or we'll work something out).
3. And Levy went unto the courts, which are called tennis, where he met the young ruler of that land, whose name was Ton-y, which is to say "One who getteth away with it, but not for ever".
4. Then said Ton-y unto Levy, "Verily, thou art a rich man and thou knowest many other rich men.
5. "Go unto them privily and say unto them 'The Messiah is here. Give unto him all your money, even unto a millionfold, and your reward shall be great.
6. "'And you will not even have to wait for the Kingdom that is to come.
7. "'For you shall be raised up, and clad in robes of ermine, and you shall be crowned with coronets and you shall sit in the House of the Lords forever.'"
8. And Levy heard this, and did even as his master had commanded.
9. And soon the coffers of the ruler of that land were filled with gifts of shekels, which are called "loans" if anyone asks.
10. But, lo, there was murmuring in the land, and people began to say, one unto another, how has this come to pass that the House of the Lords is filled with common moneylenders and even the vendors of vindaloo?
11. Can it be, they asked, that the ruler of the land hath been granting his favours in exchange for gold and silver?
12. And the ruler heard the cry of the people and was sore afraid. For he feareth the knock on the door in the hours of darkness, when the desert fox stalketh the unwary chicken.
13. And the ruler saith unto the people, "I knoweth nothing of this. For I am a guy that is called straight.
14. "If thou lookest for an guilty man, then thou needest look no further than the House of Levy."
15. And the officers came privily by night to arrest Levy.
16. And Levy waxed wroth, saying, "Knowest thou not who I am? For I am the Lord Levy, friend of Ton-y.
17. "And verily I know where the bodies are buried, if thou catchest my drift."
18. And darkness fell upon the land. And it was now the turn of Ton-y to be sore afraid.

Next week the Lesson will be taken from the Book of Ruth (Turner), the story of an innocent young girl who became a gatekeeper in the House of Ton-y and wept bitterly as she reaped emails amid the alien porn. *(Is this right? Ed.)*

GREEN GROW THE TORIES OH!

Those Books You Didn't Finish In Full

❶ A Brief History of Blunkett
❷ The Satanic Blunketts
❸ Harry Potter and the Blunkett of Doom
❹ Vernon Blunkett Little
❺ Captain Blunketti's Mandolin
❻ Why Don't Blunkett's Feet Freeze?
❼ War and Blunkett
❽ Crime and Blunkett
❾ I Can Make You Blunkett
❿ Alan Carr's Easy Way to Stop Blunkett

■ **Have you read any of the above books? Or did you give up this piece halfway through?**

Let us know on jointhedebate.co.uk – or don't and let us know why on cantbebotheredtojointhedebate.co.uk or maybe you've changed your mind and want to tell us about it on changeyourmindaboutjoiningthedebate.co.uk?

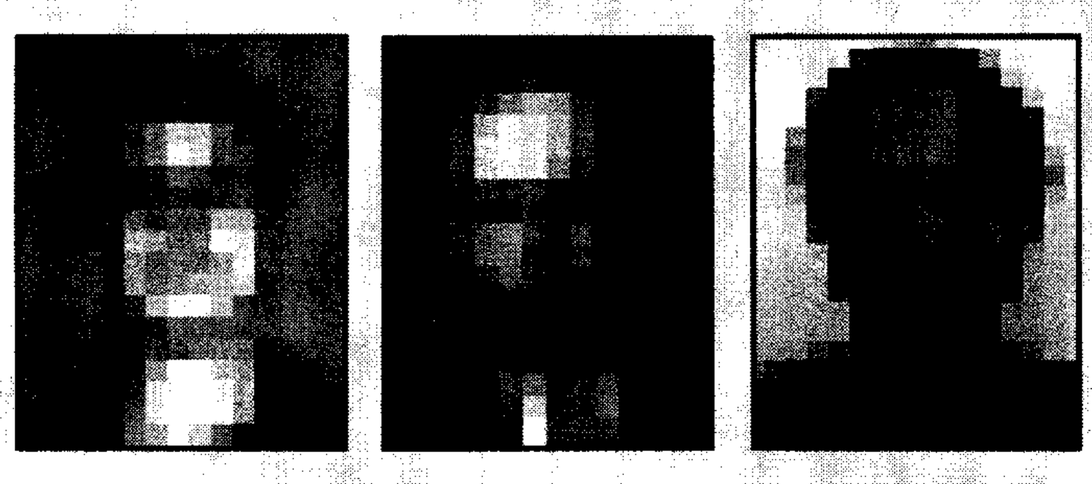
WHITE NOSE DAY

Celebrities get together to raise money to help the impoverished cocaine producers of the third world. Join them as they support projects in Colombia, Afghanistan, and London's Groucho Club.

★ Starring **Kate Moss**, TV's **Russell Brand** and many more showbiz cokeheads!

Neasden Central Police Station

WANTED!!!



These three men are wanted very urgently by the police, in connection with crimes of murder, rape, grievous bodily harm and armed robbery.

Anyone with information about the above persons should contact Neasden Central Police Station between the hours of 9.30 and 9.45am (not Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays or weekends).

We must warn that these persons are extremely dangerous and members of the public are advised not to approach them or try to identify them in any way, as this would constitute a serious contravention of their human rights, under Article 51(c) of the Right to Murder Other Citizens Act 2005.

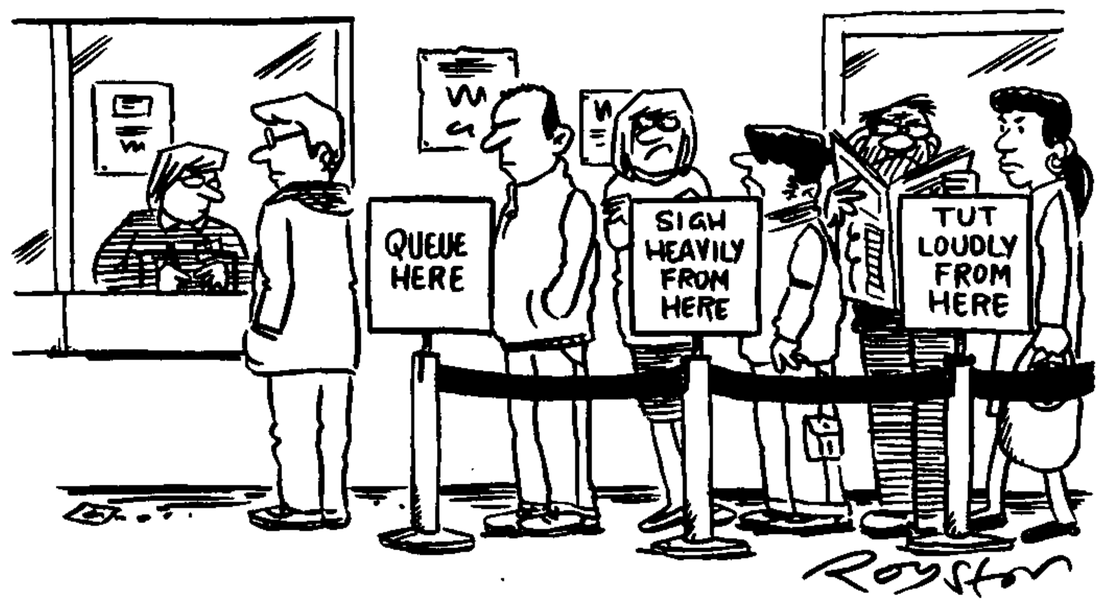
Any members of the public attempting to assist us in identifying these persons may be arrested and charged with a breach of the Data Protection Act. This carries a maximum penalty of £20,000 and/or ten years in prison.

We have recently been informed by the lawyers for the three persons not seen in these pictures and whose gender we are not permitted to reveal, that any suggestion that these persons may have been involved in criminal activities is in itself not only a breach of their human rights but also a prima facie case of libel.

Pc Fairlop who was the author of the above notice has now taken himself in for questioning, and the station will therefore be closed until further notice.

Pc Fairlop

Have you seen a crime?
Then keep it to yourself!



WEDDING OF THE CENTURY

How They Are Related

Elizabeth The First
|
Elizabeth The Second
|
Helen The Mirren
|
Elizabeth The Taylor
|
Elizabeth The Hurley

Hugh Grant
|
Hugh Hee
|
Hugh Knows
|
Hugh Cares
|
Hugh Snext

HURLEY WEDDING

Day 94

by Our Liz Hurley Staff
Phil Acres

AND still it goes on. As weary guests assembled for yet another dinner in the fabled fort of Mumbo Jumbai in the desert kingdom of Uttar Bordom, many revellers had lost hope that they would ever return to their loved ones.

Wedding to end all weddings

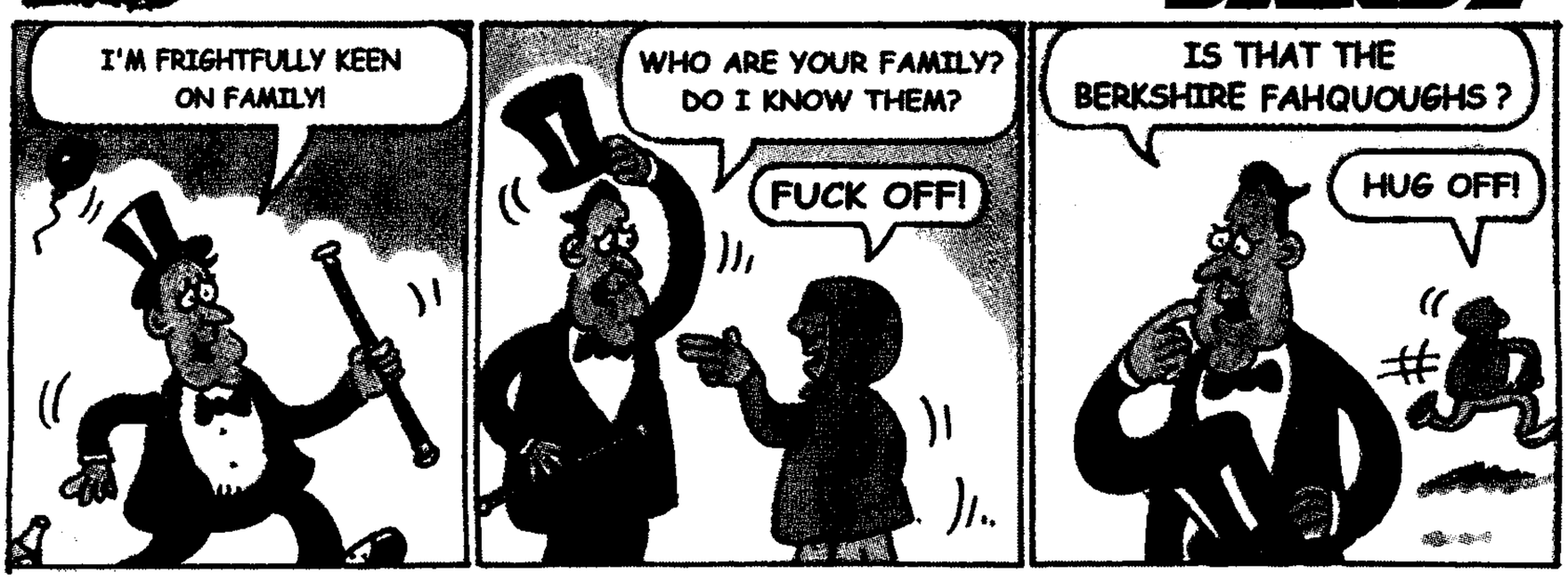
As the bride changed into her 289th outfit and the groom appeared in a bejewelled carriage drawn by tigers and peacocks, one guest confessed "I can't take any more. It's relentless, 24-hour rose petals, pink champagne and vocal tributes from Elton John." She sobbed, "I always cry at weddings but not usually from boredom."

But their was no respite as the extravaganza moved on to yet another venue with a Black-tie-meets-Bollywood themed party on the moon.

Going over the top

"They said it would all be over by Christmas," said another wedding-hardened veteran, "but at this point in time we still have no exit strategy. To be honest it's Hello on earth." (continued for ever.)

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS FROM THE GREANO AND DANDY



In The Courts

An inquest into the death of the late Diana, Princess of Hearts, and Mr Dodi Fugger, before Her Honour Dame Butler-Slosselcarrot

Dame Slosselcarrot *(for it is she)*: I think the quickest way to get this ridiculous and wasteful inquest over with is for me to hear it on my own, without all the silly business of calling a jury.

Mr Michael Hugefee QC *(for Mr Al Fugger)*: Objection, Your Honour. My client, Mr Al Fugger, a highly-respected Egyptian conman, cannot accept Your Ladyship's proposal. He believes that a single judge, however elderly and decrepit she may be, is unlikely to be persuaded by his farrago of lies. Yet a jury of twelve good persons and true is much more likely to be taken in by his nonsensical and mendacious version of events, particularly if they are readers of the Daily Express.

Dame Slosselcarrot: Are you suggesting, Mr Hugefee, that I am in the pay of the Duke of Edinburgh? *(Laughter)*

Hugefee: Indeed I am, Your Honour. Ipsissima verba, as we lawyers like to say! Can I refer you to Mr Fugger's sworn affidavit in Bundle B in which he says, "I will fuggin' prove that this fuggin' old bat is working for fuggin' MI6 and was the fuggin' driver of the white Fiat Uno".

This will be our case, I respectfully submit, and I shall be calling a number of witnesses to verify these facts.

Dame Slosselcarrot: These are indeed powerful arguments, Mr Hugefee, or so the Judges at the High Court seem to think. I am therefore minded to summon a jury, as you so eloquently suggest; so that all the world may see that even the most stupid of jurors is unlikely to be swayed by such a tissue of paranoid fabrications.

Hugefee: I am indebted to you, Your Ladyship, and indeed to Mr Fugger, for giving me such a huge sum of money to talk this nonsense!

Slosselcarrot: I have examined 159 different reports into the unfortunate events of 10 years ago, and I am bound to say that there is not a jot or scintilla of evidence to support your client's allegations – namely that the Duke of Edinburgh, aided and abetted by MI6, Smersh, Spectre and Mr Darth Vader, materialised from a spaceship inside the fatal tunnel of Pont D'Alma in order to effect the murder of the secretly married Diana, Princess of Wales, who was already pregnant with the first Muslim King of England: the Pharaoh Fayed Windsor the First.

Hugefee: I assure Your Ladyship that we have a wealth of new evidence to support every one of these claims. Indeed we have so much evidence that it will take six months just to find it on the internet!

This is why my client requests an adjournment, so that the whole matter can roll on for another six months and I can therefore collect a number of very welcome 'refreshers'.

Dame Slosselcarrot: Again, I am persuaded by the sagacity of your arguments, Mr Hugefee, and furthermore that will give me an opportunity to take a brief retirement cruise round the world – including, may I say, Mr Fugger, a visit to your native pyramids!

Fugger: If you're going to Cairo, lady, you go see my cousin. He sell carpets, very nice, very cheap. You tell him Fuggin' Fugger sent you, and he give you very good price!!

Slosselcarrot: I am indebted to you, Mr Fayed. This court is now adjourned for six months.

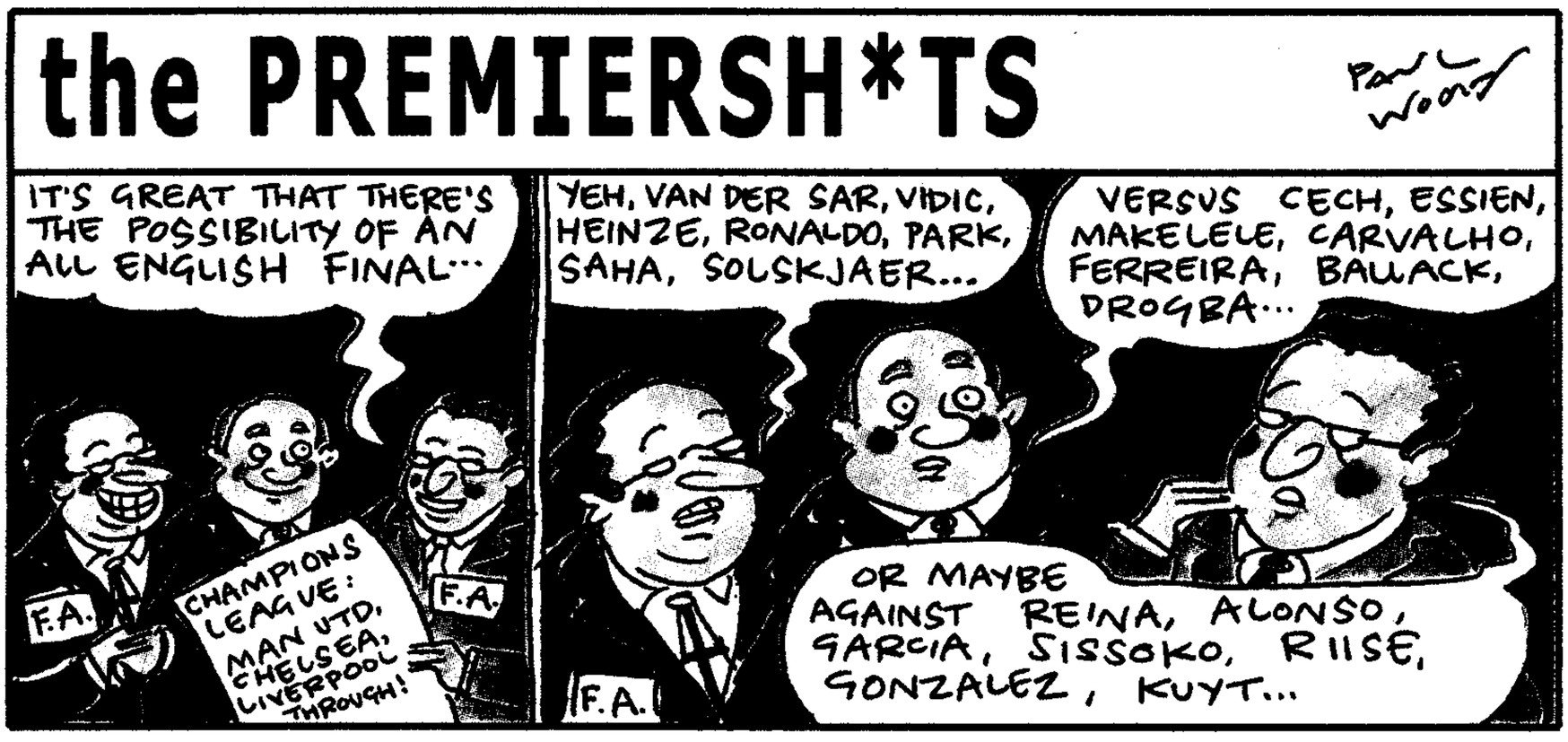
Cole Hails Fayed 'Victory'

FOLLOWING today's hearing, Mr Michael Cole, Chief Vizier to the Imperial Fugger, appeared on the steps of the Law Court to deliver the following statement:

"Mr Fayed has won a resounding victory in his battle to bring the Duke of Edinburgh and the rest of the hated Royal Family to justice.

The judge today promised that all of them would soon be taken to a forest outside Moscow and shot by firing squad for their crimes against humanity.

Mr Fayed wishes to make it clear that when this happens he will be prepared to accept the throne of England in their place, or a British passport if it's easier."


the PREMIERSH*TS
Paul Woods
IT'S GREAT THAT THERE'S THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ALL ENGLISH FINAL...
F.A.
CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: MAN UTD, CHELSEA, LIVERPOOL THROUGH!
F.A.
YEH, VAN DER SAR, VIDIC, HEINZE, RONALDO, PARK, SAHA, SOLSKJAER...
F.A.
VERSUS CECH, ESSIEN, MAKELELE, CARVALHO, FERREIRA, BALLACK, DROGBA...
OR MAYBE AGAINST REINA, ALONSO, GARCIA, SISSOKO, RIISE, GONZALEZ, KUYT...

CHARLOTTE CHURCH PREGNANT SHOCK

POETRY CORNER

Lines On The 80th Birthday Of Mr Harry Belafonte, Singer

So. Harry Belafonte.
You are 80.

Island In The Sun.
That was your big
Hit.

And, of course,
The Banana Boat Song.

All together now –
Day-o!
Da-ay-ay-o!
Daylight come and
Me wanna go
Home.

But you haven't gone
Yet!

Happy birthday.

In Memoriam John Inman, Television Actor

So. Farewell
Then John
Inman.

Camp star of
Hit 1970s comedy
Are You Being Served?

"I'm free!"
That was your
Catchphrase.

And now
(In a very real sense)
You are.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

ITV RIP-OFF SHOCK

by Our Media Staff **Connie Fishy**

THE broadcaster ITV was at the centre of a media storm last night, as evidence emerged that millions of viewers were being cheated by a TV scam.

Angry viewers paid out good money for television sets, cable subscriptions and satellite boxes, with the promise that there would be something worth watching.

But, in reality, the schedules had already been filled with rubbish and there was no chance of anyone getting to see a decent programme.

Viewers hit the ITV button and instead of getting quality entertainment, they were put "on hold" and given *The X Factor, Soapstar Superstar, Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway, Dancing On Ice, The Mint* and *I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here.*

Phoney Line Up

"We were furious," said a viewers' spokesman, "and had no option but to switch over to the blank screen on Virgin Media."

Mr Michael Grade, the Chairman of ITV, apologised to viewers, saying, "We were unaware that this was going on at ITV because, obviously, we watch the other channels because they're much better."

He continued, "But now we know that the viewers have been the victims of fraud, we are determined to put an end to this practise. We are, therefore, cancelling all ITV programmes until further notice".

ITV QUIZ

How long will ITV's premium rate phone lines stay down to make it seem that it wasn't just a publicity stunt?

Ⓐ Ten days
Ⓑ Three weeks
Ⓒ A month
Ⓓ An aubergine

Call 0845 678789 now to cast your vote. All calls are charged at standard ITV rates, £50 a minute for the first minute, £20 a minute after that. Calls are guaranteed to last a lot longer than the ban will. Not all calls will be answered, but all calls will be charged. Winners will be chosen from the production office.

VIRGIN MEDIA APOLOGIES

VIRGIN Media boss Richard Branson has apologised to its cable TV customers after Sky TV withdrew Sky 1 from their screens in a long-running dispute over money.

"We sincerely apologise to our customers that they now have only 157 mind-numbingly bad channels to watch, instead of 158," said Richard *(cont. p. 94)*

"Going to take our Wayne into care,were you?"

Let's Parlez Franglais!

avec Kilometres Kington

Lesson 94 Quittant l'Office

Chirac *(pour c'est lui)*: Au revoir, mes braves. C'est le fin d'un era. Je suis 74 et frankment c'est l'heure to go, n'est-ce pas?

M. Le Gendarme: 'Allo! 'Allo! 'Allo! Qu'est-ce que c'est all this?

Chirac: Je quitte le job de President.

Gendarme: Excellent! Vous êtes under arrest.

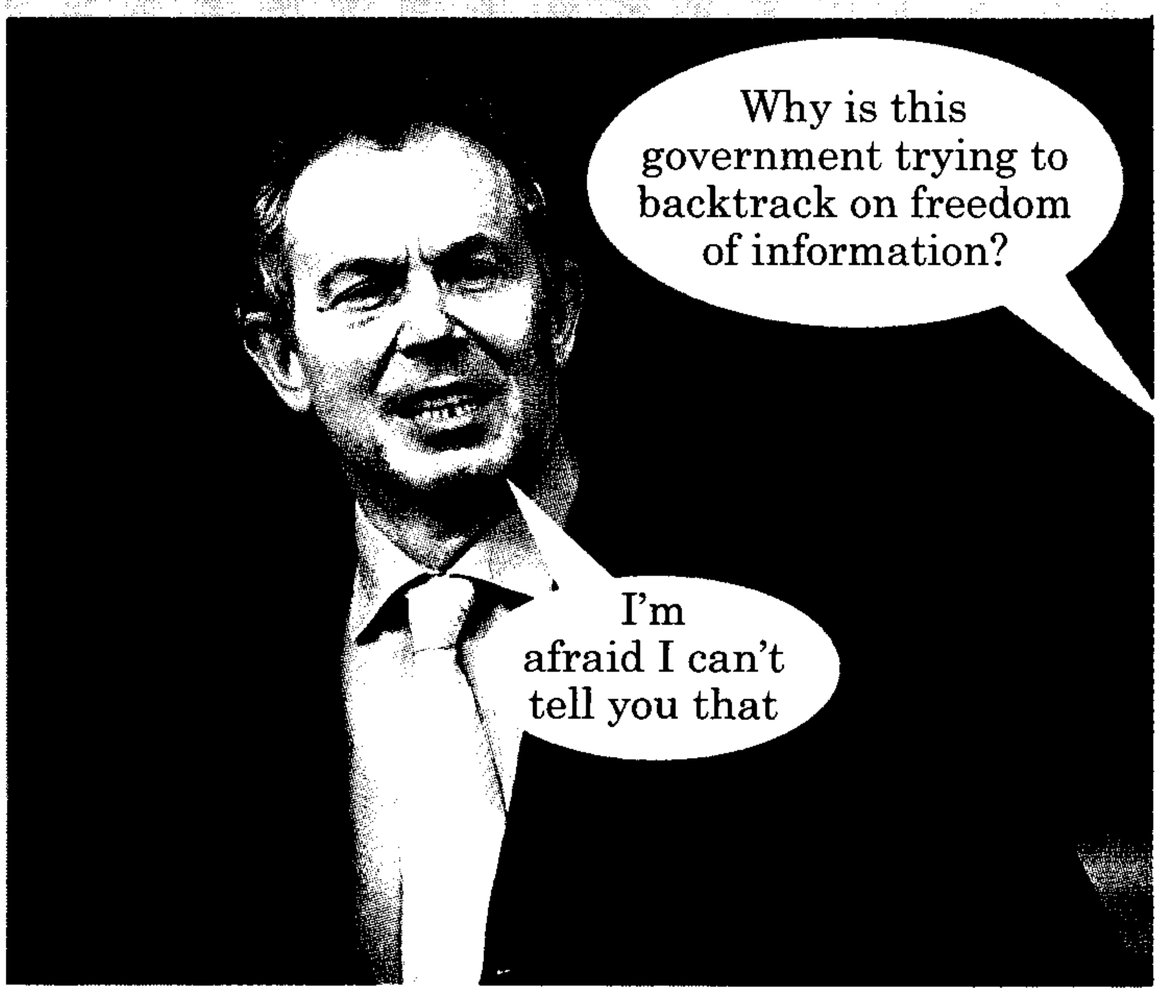
Chirac: Merde! C'est un fair gendarme.

Gendarme: C'est just like votre ami Tony Blair en Angleterre, n'est-ce pas?

● Dites nous votre opinion de this piece. Joinez le grand debate sur www.legranddebate.co.frangleterre

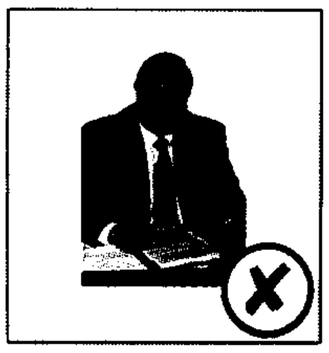
"You're in luck... the windfarm's not producing any electricity"

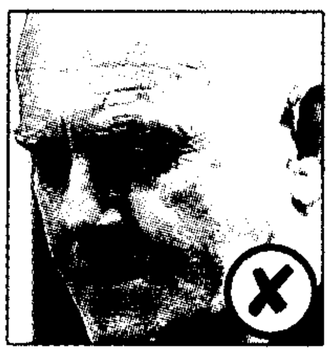
BLAIR'S LEGACY



New passport guidelines: help with photographs

Too close


Not far away enough


Too frightening

Too old

Busy background

Another person in picture

Avoiding camera

Totally unacceptable

DAILY MAIL EXCLUSIVE

LORD LEVY DID SELL HONOURS

- Bears did shit in the woods
- Pope did practise Catholicism

DISCOVERY OF JESUS TOMB ROCKS FAITHFUL

by Our Religious Affairs Staff **St Matthew D'Ancona**

MILLIONS of believers around the world are reeling following the news that the tomb of Jesus along with that of his wife Mary and son Judah has been found near Jerusalem.

A typical reaction came from one woman in the airport lounge at Heathrow.

"If this is true, it means that everything I believe is rubbish. It has shattered my faith which is based on the literal interpretation of the Da Vinci Code."

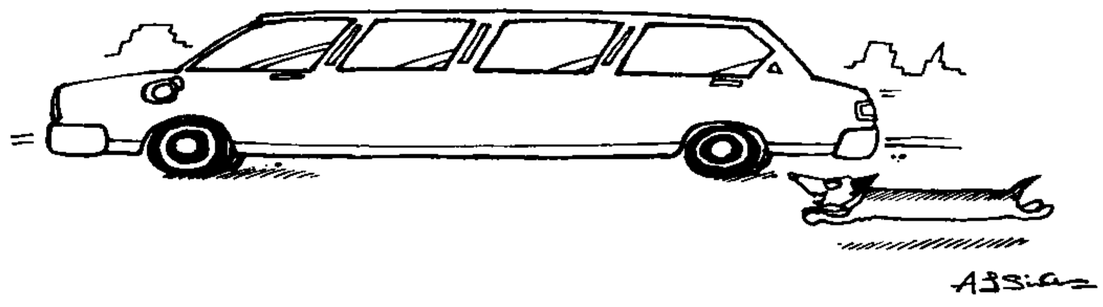
Not So Good Book

"The code claims that Jesus' wife Mary travelled to France with her son and established a royal bloodline that led through the Merovingian dynasty right down to French actress Audrey Tatou.

"All of a sudden it seems as though Jesus and his family never went to France at all and stayed

in Israel until their tombs were discovered by Hollywood director James Cameron. I just don't know what to believe any more."

She continued, "This challenges all that I hold to be true, and raises fundamental questions about the gospel according to Dan, i.e. is it not true that albino monks go around assassinating French professors in the Louvre? Is Sir Ian McKellan *not* really an expert on Grail symbology? Why did I spend £4.99 in Waterstones? Am I a gullible idiot *(cont. p. 94)*



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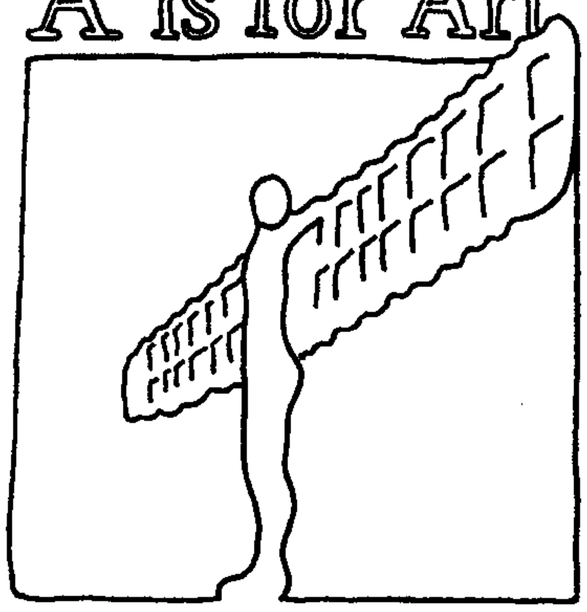
Do You Want To Join The Legover Profession?

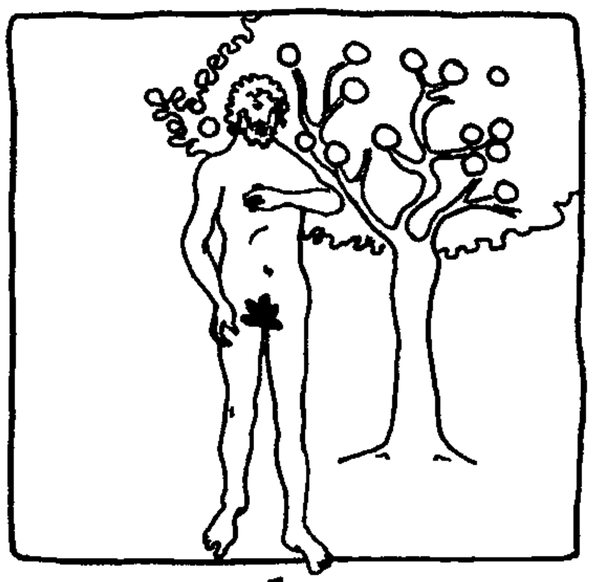
WE ARE an old established firm of lawyers looking for young women to work as partners in our Chambers after lunch. We are Judges, Recorders and senior QCs with a keen interest in casual sexual intercourse. Applicants should be very fruity with a willingness to engage in a wide variety of briefs.

Apply in person to 2 Old Lechers Yard, The Inner Temple, London EC LAY.

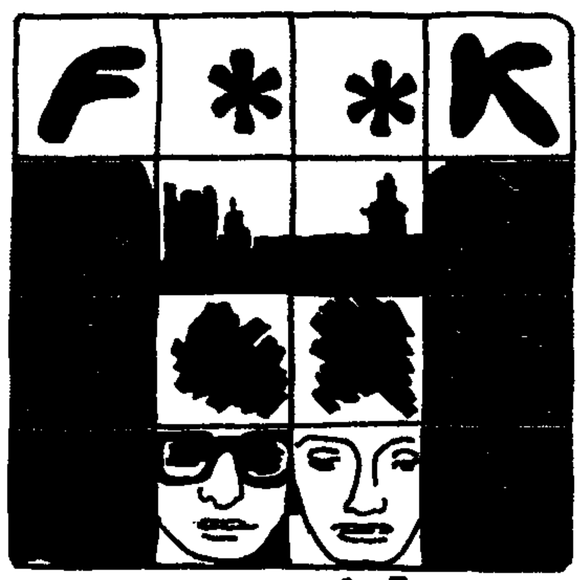
A is for Art

Sioux Bradshaw


angel


adam

apple



asterisk

DIARY

HRH PRINCE CHARLES

May I, as it were, "kick off" this diary by saying how delighted I am to have the immense good fortune of being asked to contribute to this remarkable "diary" forum.

The editor has asked me to share my thoughts on "modern life". Sadly, none of us may count ourselves wholly insulated from this singularly wearisome phenomenon!

I have to confess that only yesterday I was watching that most infernal of modernistic contraptions, the "television". The programme on offer was decidedly dull: a lot of grey, and without music or dialogue, though one could just about make out the hazy image of a frowning middle-aged man in a tweed suit sitting on a sofa staring back at one.

At that moment, my butler came in and asked if I would prefer the "TV" switched on. I must confess it made all the difference. My advice to anyone who has taken the trouble to invest in a television is do first make sure you have someone to come in and switch it on for you.

● **The Things They Come Up With (1):** A "toasted cheese sandwich"! What WILL they think of next?

The aforementioned television programme seemed to be about a housewife cooking "fished fingers" for her three children. Little else happened, to be frank, and the programme concluded in a matter of seconds with the children giving the "thumbs up" sign, and an unseen man speaking an oblique line of blank verse about the need for a bird's eye. Frankly, it is nothing short of a catastrophe that so much modern poetry leaves us cold. Like many people, I have enormous regard for Shakespeare, with his spiritually uplifting emphasis on Kings and Princes.

But what struck me most about this brief "television" programme was that, for all her undoubted qualities, the unnamed housewife didn't seem to have given the first thought as to which estate these "fished fingers" were caught on, what type of fly had been recommended by the ghillie, and so forth. It seems to me one of the great tragedies of modern existence that so very few of us know the origin of the food our butler brings us. As a nation, we may have grown materially wealthier, but have we really, one sometimes wonders, grown any the wiser?

● **The Things They Come Up With! (2):** They tell me that in some shops have started selling loaves of bread that are what they call "ready-and-sliced". I fervently hope this is one trend that doesn't "catch on". And is there really any need for this new-fangled idea of soup in tins? Broth tastes so much better bubbling away in a great big open pot, stirred by a chef who really knows his stuff and served at one's table in the open air by a marvellous old character somewhere on a wonderful Highland moor. By denying our children such pleasures, I fear we are in profound danger of cutting them off from reality.

Our ancestors had this tremendous bedrock of wisdom. Tragically, I fear we are losing our common belief that mankind has much to learn from the literally wonderful treasure-house of the past.

One marvellous old adage, handed down to me by my remarkable grandmother, who knew all about these things, was: "Money doesn't grow on trees". This is, I suspect, a gem of ancient wisdom that we are in dreadful danger of forgetting. Only the other day, touring a High Street somewhere in that wonderful area of the country we know as the Mid-Lands, I witnessed the most extraordinary event. An apparently ordinary fellow walked up to a wall and pressed a piece of card half the size of my hand into it. Seconds later out poured the most enormous amount of bank notes.

I was frankly flabbergasted. Like everyone else, I get money by asking my man for it - but now we are told that it just comes willy-nilly out of walls in the Mid-Lands! We are often told that the forward march of civilisation is somehow necessary, but is all progress really is for the better?

● **The Things They Come Up With! (3):** The so-called London Eye may be very "relevant" and "contemporary", as the so-called experts(!) insist on telling us, but why on earth could it not have been constructed out of traditional materials, and in a form that has deeper roots in our nation's historic past? Our obsession with "the modern" can be so dreadfully soul-destroying. A classical square rather than a modish circle would have been far more appropriate, and I would have preferred each of the "pods" designed as a perfect replica of a delightful Georgian pavilion. And I can't say this too often: was there really any need to make the whole contraption spin round and round in that mad frenzy? I sometimes feel "in my bones" that we as a nation stand in very grave danger of losing sight of the immense virtue in sitting still.

A tremendous amount of what I call "stuff and nonsense" has been written about my so-called "disapproval" of the "Mr MacDonald's" chain of restaurants. Some of my critics even complained that I had never have eaten in one.

With this in mind, myself and my dear wife ventured into one of these estimable establishments last week. We brought our own hampers of course, so I am ill-equipped to comment on the culinary experience, but might I make one constructive suggestion? My estimable butler told me that when he attempted to pull out the chair, so as to let one to sit on it, he found to his horror that it had been stapled to the floor! It strikes me that is just the sort of thing that will stop ordinary families from going to "Mr MacDonald's": no one likes to embarrass their butler in public.

● **The Things They Come Up With! (4):** They tell me they have now developed railway trains jam-packed with hundreds of seats. This means that ordinary travellers are now obliged to travel hugger-mugger with hundreds of complete strangers, regardless of whether they are family. Nor is there a drawing-room where one might relax by oneself with a good book. It sometimes seems to me that the people in charge of these things haven't the foggiest idea of what ordinary people want. Railways always represented the most perfectly civilised way to travel around the country in silence whilst enjoying one's own company. Alas, I fear those days may now be gone forever.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

PIXIE FROU FROU, HAVE YOU STARTED USING THOSE PRESCRIPTION PILLS AGAIN?
UM... WELL...
WE'VE BEEN THROUGH THIS BEFORE: YOU CAN EASILY GET ADDICTED TO THOSE. YOU'VE GOT TO STOP!
I AM STOPPING, DAD... HONESTLY I SWEAR IT..
YEAH YEAH YEAH... PROMISES PROMISES.
NO...
NOT THAT REHAB CLINIC IN MALIBU AGAIN...
IF IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR BRITNEY IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU...
PROMISES TREATMENT CENTRES
YOU'RE BOOKED IN.

Literary Review

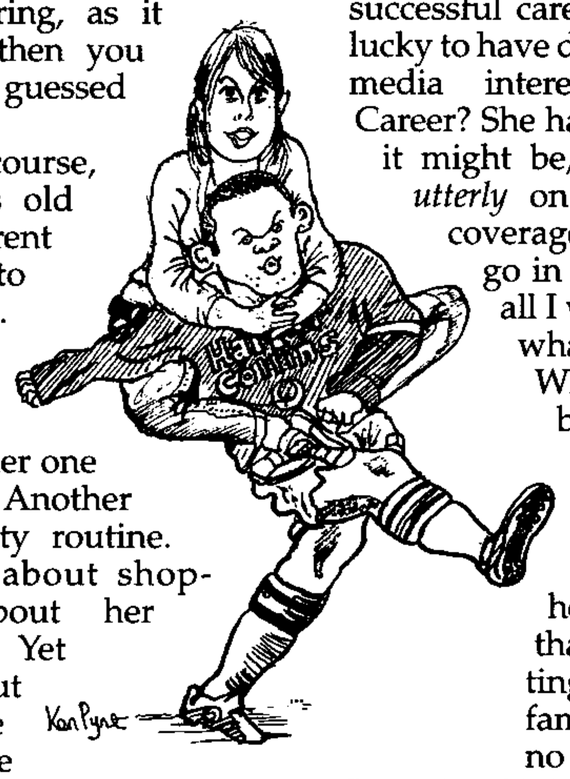
Coleen McPooter

Coleen: Welcome To My World

(HarperCollins, £14.99)

NO ONE can remember her surname – not even her publishers, who haven't been able to find room for it anywhere on the cover of this "book". But it hardly matters, for Coleen has already joined the pantheon of singly named superstars, adored and admired by all. Her sunny, slightly vacant smile shines out of every newspaper and magazine in the land, and the rest of us can only worship from afar.

Until now, that is. As if in response to the terrible shortage of celebrity autobiographies currently afflicting our bookshops, and Asda, there arrives *Welcome To My World*, telling us at some length exactly what it's like to be Wayne Rooney's girlfriend. Crucifyingly boring, as it turns out, but then you had probably guessed that.



Coleen, of course, is just 21 years old and a coherent thought has yet to enter her head. So there's an entire chapter about weight and diets. Another one about shopping. Another about her beauty routine. A second one about shopping. One about her endorsements. Yet another one about shopping. "The newspapers were interested in who Wayne's girlfriend was but because there were no skeletons in my cupboard they had nothing to print. So, instead, they invented this shopping persona." Hmm. True, of the 67 full-colour photos in the book, only five feature shopping bags, but this is the ur-image of her that lodges in all our minds. And she does go on about it. "All I ever asked for [as a child] on birthdays or for Christmas would be clothes or shoes, and I would cry and cry until she bought me what I wanted." These days Coleen is a little more mature and level-headed. "It's good to have clear-outs, but I refuse to part with any of my handbags." But what of food? "During the week I'll aim to have cereal for breakfast – Cornflakes or Sugar Puffs – with semi-skimmed milk." If only she had more time off. "Me and Wayne always say we're going to buy a couple of bikes and go out cycling but we never get round to it."

For her life is terrifyingly busy these days. Magazines call her publicist inviting her to a photo-shoot. "Depending on who it is and what they want to do, I'll either say yes or no." She'll travel down to London for the shoot. "The shoots are nearly always in London because that's where the magazines are based, and where most of the good studios are." Breakfast is usually laid on, "and maybe I'll have a slice of toast". Then she chooses which clothes to wear. "If something doesn't suit me then I'll try on something else."

There are 328 pages of this. People who actually write their own books – Coleen has learned enough of the game not to credit a ghostwriter – will particularly appreciate the thick, heavy high-quality paper and full-colour printing – all those things they are not allowed to have in their books. The design is a riot of pinkness with occasional bursts of pinkness for variety. Occasionally, chunks of copy are pulled out of the main text and written out in someone's pink handwriting. Surely it's not actually Coleen's? Can she spare the time? Then you realise that it's an artfully designed computer font. It's all about presentation. "Don't get me wrong. I know the press has a job to do. I also understand that the successful careers Wayne and I are lucky to have depend to an extent on media interest and coverage." Career? She has a career? Whatever it might be, though, it depends *utterly* on media interest and coverage. "My career can still go in many directions, and all I want to do is build on what I've done already." Which, of course, is bugger all.

Perhaps we should not be too harsh on her. It's not her fault that someone so undistinguished can achieve fame and riches for no reason whatsoever. Indeed, with her constant supply of tips and advice and lists of favourite handbags, she clearly enjoys passing on her accumulated wisdom to the thousands of other talentless young people who will buy this book. Wayne is probably lucky to have her. As ever, he stares out of photos like a vast terrified rodent. There's an entire chapter about his indifference towards clothes. "At this moment in time I can't see Wayne getting over-interested in fashion or bringing out his own after-shave, but you never know." Wayne's Eau de Sweaty Socks. Don't put it past her.

Books & Bookmen

■ SIR Richard "Beardie" Branson's Virgin Books imprint was sold to Random House last week for £3.5m. Or was it £4.5m? For the deal coincided with an extra £1m payment by Random House to Beardie in person, supposedly as an advance for his next five books – the first being about his campaign to save the planet.

If this is a genuine book advance, rather than a reward for flogging his company, it seems hard to justify. Beardie's most recent book – *Screw It, Let's Do It: Lessons in Life* – was published on World Book Day a year ago and has sold 62,000 copies at a bargain £2.99. So it has earned royalties of about £19.000. His previous book was the autobiography *Losing My Virginity*. Although the sales records are incomplete, since 2005 it seems to have sold around 102,000 copies, which would be worth about £100,000 in royalties.

None of which begins to make sense of a £1m advance for five books, or £200,000 per title. Unless of course the book deal was bait from Random House boss Gail Rebuck, aka Lady Gould of Brookwood, who is apparently trying to use acquisitions to regain the market share top spot her group lost to Hachette. Perhaps she isn't aware that Branson habitually grabs the nearest woman and turns her upside-down whenever he launches a new product. Best underwear is advisable.

■ "I AM DISTRESSED to find myself reported as participating in a 'literary spat', and as 'pouring scorn' on an individual, comedian Peter Kay, for whom I actually feel nothing but goodwill," wrote a plaintive Richard Dawkins to the *Guardian* two days after he demanded to know how the, er, comedian could be taken "seriously" after saying he found the idea of God "comforting".

Apparently the great fan of empirical evidence was merely giving an opinion off the top of his head on "a quotation from somebody, previously unknown to me", as is his wont: "I am one of those whom reporters regularly telephone for a soundbite… I gave my usual response." So that's all fine then.

Dawkins might, however, wish to pick his fights more carefully. Taking on God is one thing, but Kay has some serious fans out there. He has shifted over 600,000 copies of his memoirs *The Sound of Laughter* which is competing with Dawkins' *The God Delusion* in this year's Galaxy British Book Awards. Dawkins is less well-loved and indeed some of his colleagues at Oxford amuse themselves by telling stories of how he likes to be lulled to sleep by bedtime readings from his own works, courtesy of his wife, former *Doctor Who* actress Lalla Ward.

■ SIMON and Schuster is incredibly excited about its latest acquisition, *The Last Game: Love, Death and Football at the End of the Eighties* by Jason Cowley, a hack on the *New Statesman* and editor of *Observer Sports Monthly*.

Concentrating on Arsenal's triumphant last game of the 1989 football season, it also delves into Cowley's relationship with his father. At S&S, Andrew Gordon describes it as "one of the best proposals I have seen for a while". Perhaps its appeal lies in its uncanny resemblance to Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch*, published in 1992, which was all about an Arsenal fan's personal relationships and the last game of the 1989 season…

Cowley's agent won't be drawn further on the book's contents, fearing that "because of the nature of the idea, someone may copy it". But a little more detail may be needed if we're to be reassured that somebody hasn't copied someone else already.

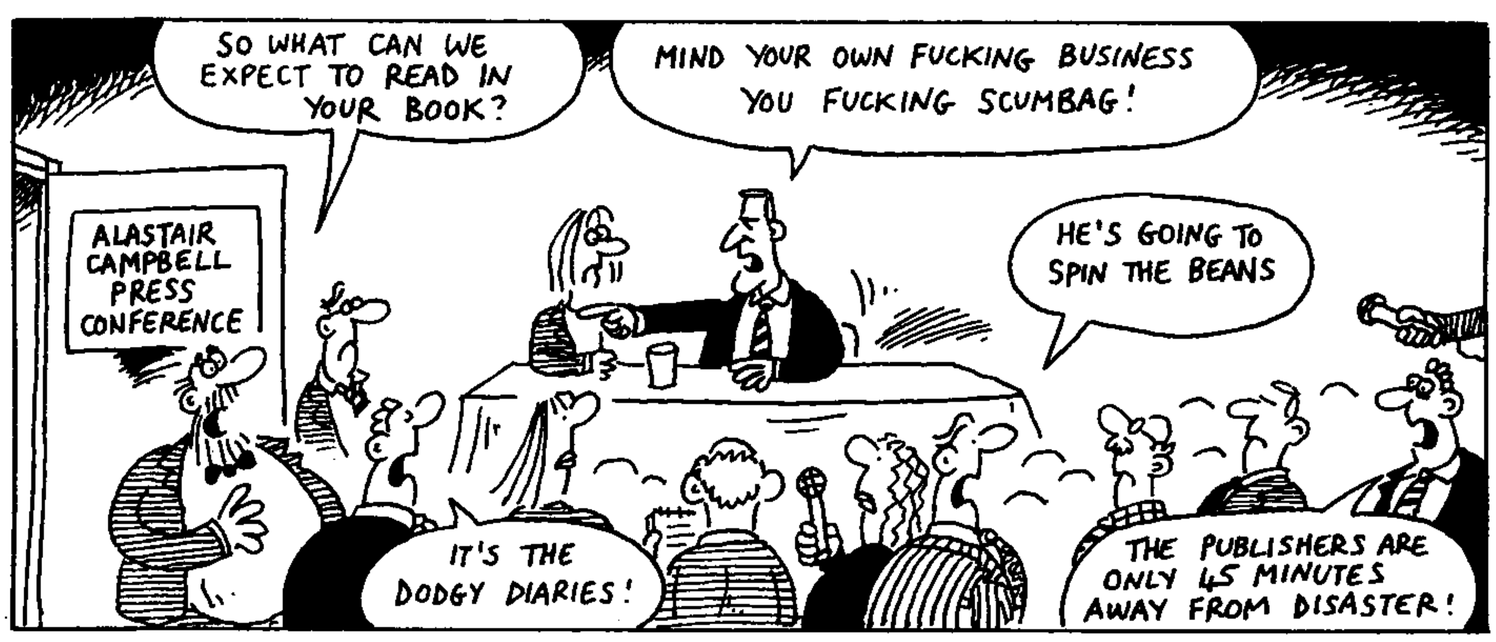
LIBRARY NEWS

■ THE Feminist Library in Southwark has been given just one year to live after struggling on despite a huge hike in its rent.

An emergency meeting of the independent library's management committee, volunteers and supporters agreed that unless a suitable new home is found by February 2008, the collection will have to be split up and given to any archives that will take it.

The library contains thousands of books, pamphlets, magazines and academic papers related to the women's liberation movement between 1900 and the present. For 15 years, Southwark Council subsidised the £12,000 a year rent on the volunteer-run library, which is used by students from several of London's universities as well as independent researchers. That support was pulled in 2003. More information on using the library or volunteering is at http://www.myspace.com/feministlibrary.

Literary Review continues overleaf


SO WHAT CAN WE EXPECT TO READ IN YOUR BOOK?
MIND YOUR OWN FUCKING BUSINESS YOU FUCKING SCUMBAG!
ALASTAIR CAMPBELL PRESS CONFERENCE
HE'S GOING TO SPIN THE BEANS
IT'S THE DODGY DIARIES!
THE PUBLISHERS ARE ONLY 45 MINUTES AWAY FROM DISASTER!

Private Eye's Most Wanted

Position	Author	Title	Publisher	Reported advance	Sales to date	Cost of advance per book	Copies needed to sell to make back advance
1	David Blunkett	*The Blunkett Tapes*	Bloomsbury	£400,000	4,030	£99.26	133,333
2	Michael Cox	*The Meaning Of Night*	John Murray	£500,000	8,466	£59.06	232,558
3	Diane Setterfield	*The Thirteenth Tale*	Orion	£800,000	13,487	£59.32	516,129
4	Rupert Everett	*Red Carpets & Other Banana Skins*	Little Brown	£1,000,000	48,885	£20.46	621,118
5	Vikram Seth	*Two Lives*	Little Brown	£1,400,000	67,958	£20.60	1,272,727

Pidgin guano

A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers

By Xiaolu Guo

(Chatto & Windus, £12.99)

FOREIGNERS who can't quite get the subtleties of the language have long been a staple of a certain kind of English comedy. It's unusual, though, for the foreigners to make fun of themselves in this way. Yet this is what Xiaolu Guo has done with her depiction of a Chinese girl's attempts to get to grips with English language and culture. "I not understanding," she says, "sorry of my English." She is taken to what she thinks is called Queue Gardens and, on a trip to Paris, finds the French for pancake (crêpe) sounds just like "crap". "I not laughing," one feels like commenting, "sorry of my humour."

A little of this sort of thing goes a long way. The problem is that Xiaolu Guo, a Chinese writer and film-maker who moved to London in 2002, has written the *entire novel* in this cringing pidgin. Allegedly inspired by the author's own journal, it purports to be the story of a peasant girl from China who comes to London for a year to learn English so she can get a better job back in Beijing. While in England she has the misfortune to meet and fall in love with the sort of typical Englishman you only ever find in chick-lit novels: a tall non-smoking vegetarian formerly gay sculptor who delivers fantastic sex but can't commit to save his life. (Actually he also lives in Hackney and drives a white van, so he is not such a paragon after all.)

Apart from the device of telling the whole sorry tale from beginning to end in her narrator's struggling English, Xiaolu Guo has adopted the hackneyed conceit of heading each short chapter with an appropriate definition from her heroine's trusty Chinese-English dictionary. Thus the chapter headed "Instruction" includes a hilarious account of her puzzling over the instructions on a packet of condoms. A chapter in which she receives, as a birthday present from her Japanese friend Yoko, a "waterproof personal massager", i.e. vibrator (made in China), is headed with a definition of "Humour". Well, sex is always hilarious in England, isn't it? Thus in another chapter, headed with the definition "Custom", the boyfriend patiently explains to the funny foreign girl why it's perfectly okay to sit in the greasy spoon café reading a tabloid newspaper depicting half-naked girls but not okay to sit there with a top shelf porn mag looking up all the rude words in your dictionary. Needless to say there's another chapter headed with the definition "Fart".

There's also one headed "Romance", even though in an earlier chapter she says "Romance not to be found in my Concise Chinese-English Dictionary". That this error may not be entirely deliberate gains support from other indications that the author has grown tired and embarrassed by her own conceit. Under the definition of "Nonsense" there's a chunk of writing in Chinese characters with an "editor's translation" revealing the sentiment: "I am sick of speaking English like this. I am sick of writing English like this." By now many readers, no doubt mindful of the chapters headed "Migraine" and "Frustration", will equally be sick of reading English like this.

Given that a recent survey of GCSE results showed that Chinese students outperformed all other ethnic groups in learning English (as reported in the *Independent*, 16 February), it seems not only mean but inaccurate to "pidgin-hole" the heroine in this deprecating way, just as the reps will no doubt be pigeon-holing the book itself as some sort of "chick-lit with chopsticks". One fears a whole new genre in the offing.

First Drafts

Raymond Chandler

Pseuds Corner

If arts funding in England has a function, It must be to try to culturally enfranchise us all, to build a space where we can see our hopes, fears and frustrations expressed, as part of a shared and equally contested narrative.

AUGUSTUS CASELY-HAYFORD, Executive Director, Arts Stratgey at Arts Council England, *Independent*

In a market crowded with celebrities, [Billie] Piper cuts a singular swath. A teenage pop star at the age of 15, she was unusual from the start...With her strong brow, ample mouth and gleaming teeth, she looked like some feral Wolf Green, just as likely to eat her fans as sign their autograph books.

Her lupine charisma lent her first single, Because We Want To, an unexpectedly threatening edge. While the lyrics ran: "Why you gotta play that song so loud?/ Because we want to!/Because we want to!", they could just as easily have gone: 'Why you gotta worship the wolf-god, Fenris, and pray for the beginning of Ragnarok/ Because we want to!/Because we want to!" In a world of anaemic mopsy jail-bait, it all felt like a rather glorious mistake.

CAITLIN MORAN, *The Times*

I never expected it. I never thought I wanted it, this consummate need of children that

devours me, sends me rigid with boredom and rage, sometimes, flattening me with a sense of despair, like no other, and also lifts me up like on wings with the euphoria of soaring, wondering happiness and love. Yet how I feel the contradictions and the life that contains them – so real, in fact, it's sometimes hard to find realities elsewhere. I can't remember certain things like I used to remember. Did I write that cheque for the gas last week? What kind of mortgage do we have? I don't seem interested any more in hanging onto facts like these. Neither do I express myself with the certainty I had before; I don't think I even have certainties anymore. Instead I live in a somewhere else that's alive with questions and with questioning, and answers that lead only onto other, different answers. It's somewhere far away from these old certainties, this place, where sentences begun may end unfinished, and paragraphs dissolve away. A somewhere else where sometimes I can barely speak at all...[continues]

KIRSTY GUNN on being a mother, *Guardian*

Thursday

...Then it was back home to eat an Ethiopian vegetable stew I'd already prepared.

STEPHEN BAYLEY's week, *Guardian*

It has the qualities already widely associated with his collaborator Charlie Kaufman: that is, the playful, fantastical feel of a Woody Allen short story, or Gore Vidal's Myra Breckinridge novels, the movies of Richard Lester – but also the lo-fi world of eastern European animation and the make-do-and-mend quality of the Banana Splits show from 1970s children's TV.

PETER BRADSHAW on Michael Gondry's The Science of Sheep, *Guardian*

CONTRIBUTORS: Strobes, Darren Walker, Judy Osborne, Emma Brech, Maureen Lee.

IN THE BACK

NHS I.T.

System failure con-tinues...

JUST days after the *Eye's* special report on the NHS I.T. fiasco (last issue), the stranglehold on NHS trusts imposed under the National Programme for I.T. is set to be loosened. The big contractors BT, CSC and Fujitsu and their software suppliers iSoft and Cerner aren't proving up to the job and alternatives will now be permitted.

Connecting for Health officials deny any rethink, but have been talking on the quiet with other software suppliers – the very firms ridden out when the bone-headed decision to hand out regional monopolies was taken four years ago. But it looks to be a hard-fought victory; as the *Eye* report noted, only last year programme head Richard Granger was insisting that Accenture stick with the hopeless iSoft – with disastrous consequences, as Accenture simply walked away.

Granger's indulgence of his other pisspoor suppliers knows no limits. New figures obtained by the *Eye* show that by the end of 2006, Fujitsu, which had been paid just £27m for what it had delivered on its South of England contract (next to nothing), had received £253m in "advance payments". These are simply subs from the taxpayer to flatter the companies' accounts and cover costs running into hundreds of millions.

In total, the big suppliers have received £639m up front from the taxpayer for providing nothing – so much for paying on results as promised.

THE Fujitsu manager who recently told a conference that the programme "isn't working" and "isn't going to work", found himself up before the Public Accounts Committee last week.

Suspended from his job as soon as his words hit the pages of *Computer Weekly*, Andrew Rollerson confirmed that although he remained an enthusiast for NHS I.T., all his comments, including that the whole thing might end up "a camel, and not the racehorse that we might try to produce", had been accurately reported.

Rollerson went further and declared that "the appropriate mechanism for consultation in order to achieve the objective has not yet been found". In other words, four years into the programme the people running it still don't know what's required by the NHS trusts having to use the wretched systems.

MORE, too, on struggling London regional supplier BT's desperate attempts to get some trusts interested in its I. T. systems. Having hoovered up several of the capital's top NHS managers, the company has taken on the former chief executive of Shrewsbury and Telford NHS trust Neil Taylor.

Taylor's record isn't quite as distinguished as his fellow ex-NHS colleagues. In September 2005 at Shrewsbury Crown Court he was convicted of fraud and sentenced to 12 months in prison, suspended for two years. He had falsely claimed to have qualifications, including a business administration degree, when he won the £120,000-a-year job.

Never mind, Taylor is now understood to work for BT's managing director of health Patrick O'Connell, this time legally fleecing the health service. BT would only say he is "a temporary contractor to BT working in a general support role and not in relation to any customer contract". So that's alright then.

DEFENCE

All MoD cons

MORE on the desperate state of defence housing following the recent scandal over the dire conditions in which military families are forced to live.

As *Eye* 1176 reported, in 2005 maintenance was handed to MODern Housing Solutions – everything you could hope for in a name for a New Labour "outsourcer", but predictably inept at the job. Reports reach the *Eye* that the company, a consortium of Carillion, Atkins and Enterprise, is already struggling on the deal and can't manage the safety inspections necessary to ensure the houses have "CP12" gas safety certificates. What was once performed by engineers directly for the MoD has not only been outsourced but sub-contracted to yet another company. Costs have escalated and experienced engineers have been lost. The consequent lack of safety cover has even forced families into hotel accommodation at yet more expense – though the MoD said that "to the best of our knowledge" no one had been moved from a house to a hotel for this reason. No comment then on whether housing was available in the first place.

Meanwhile the company that bought the housing in 1996, Annington, continues to do very nicely. When the forces no longer want to rent houses from Annington the company sells them, with the MoD recouping a share of any profit on the property it paid for in the first place. But the taxpayer only gets 22 percent of the gains, and since 1996 has recouped just £140m. That means that in the same period Annington, controlled by Japanese investment bank Nomura, has bagged £500m (which would have come in very handy in the defence budget, not least for the dirty work of maintaining and upgrading the housing that remains the public sector's responsibility). And there's plenty more bunce to come: the MoD's share of future gains, expected to be large, soon drops to 10 percent and disappears completely in 2011.

A 1998 National Audit office finding that the taxpayer was short-changed by up to £140m on the sale now looks to have been highly optimistic.

IT for purpose

SO JUST how did EDS secure, without any competition, the second phase of the £4bn defence information infrastructure (DII) project to integrate all the Ministry of Defence's computer systems?

The consortium that EDS leads, known as ATLAS, was supposed to have been judged on its "delivery of [phase] 1 to plan", which involved replacing MoD computers. So what was the plan? A parliamentary question from Labour MP David Taylor reveals that 4,647 new computers should have been up and running by the end of 2006. And how many were? Er, 2,224, less than half the target, in just 166 of the 680 sites where the job should have been completed.

Never mind, EDS was quietly handed the next £700m increment of the DII project, to install a further 44,000 desktop computers, while defence minister Adam Ingram blamed the woeful performance on phase 1 on delays in "sites being prepared and ready to receive them" and "the provision of some software releases". In other words, EDS's IT wasn't up to the job and those running the sites – often the usual "outsourcing" suspects – didn't get their act together. A spokeswoman said performance had improved in the quarter leading up to the latest award, however. Dangling a £700m carrot can make even EDS pull its finger out!

Once EDS got its feet under the table there was never any real danger the cash wouldn't keep rolling in. The *Eye* understands that even the department's own advisers couldn't see the value for money but ministers went ahead anyway to avoid embarrassment. Another multi-billion pound victory in the pisspoor computer firm's self-declared quest to "protect government business and expand". Kerr-ching!

CORRUPTION

Mott-ley crew

THE Eye must apologise for suggesting that Mott MacDonald offered bribes of up to £75,000 to African officials involved in the massive Lesotho highlands water project. In fact, the Serious Fraud Office is looking at allegations that it handed over far more – a total of £282,665 – over six years.

Mott MacDonald is the government's favourite engineering consultancy, with contracts ranging from Wembley Stadium to Heathrow's Terminal Five and the 2012 Olympics. As well as handling prestigious construction projects, it runs all the schools in the London borough of Islington and manages Tony Blair's favourite Mossbourne Academy, in Hackney. Its board includes the former education minister Baroness Blackstone, and last year it was the sixth biggest supplier of consultancy work to the government – with contracts worth £77m.

The Lesotho allegations – passed to the SFO by the Foreign Office – represent the first time a British company has been named in ongoing trials related to the water project. Four major European construction companies have so far been found guilty and two have been blacklisted by the World Bank. The allegations surfaced in the Lesotho High Court during the bribery trial of Reatile Mochebelele, the former top government official with the Lesotho Highlands Water Commission, and his deputy, Letlafuao Molapo. A forensic audit presented by the prosecution alleged that Mott MacDonald and its joint venture partner, Lahmeyer International of Germany, agreed to split commissions paid to the two men up until 1999. The report, by Trevor White of PricewaterhouseCoopers, also said Lahmeyer and Mott MacDonald agreed to pay the former chief executive of the project, Masupha Sole (currently in prison for corruption) more than £570,000, of which £208,000 was said to have been paid by Mott MacDonald.

Mott MacDonald appears to have been dropped in it by Lahmeyer, which was convicted three years ago of bribing Sole and as a result became the second company (after Acres International of Canada – Eyes passim) to be blacklisted and banned from World Bank projects for seven years. In February this year, just as Lahmeyer was about to face another trial for bribing the other two officials, it decided to cooperate with the prosecutor and the two men were charged instead. As a result, the World Bank said it might reduce the ban to three years – "if Lahmeyer puts in place a satisfactory corporate compliance and ethics program and cooperates fully with the Bank in disclosing any past misconduct, including through a review of its Bank-financed contracts".

It seems that White's report was compiled using documents supplied by Lahmeyer. In it he concludes: "It is evident from the documents … that MMI [Mott Macdonald] were responsible for a portion of the commission paid. The calculation of the amount to be paid and the payment thereof was according to documents, however, only done with the prior approval of MMI."

Private Eye repeatedly asked Mott Macdonald to comment on the allegations in the report. No reply was forthcoming.

Science on trial

SO FINALLY the courts have cleared Angela and Ian Gay of poisoning with a massive overdose of salt the little boy they wanted to adopt.

Eye readers may remember how one month after the couple were convicted in January 2005 of forcibly administering salt to three-year-old Christian Blewitt – apparently as a punishment for misbehaviour – the *Eye* raised a series of questions about the medical evidence relied upon to convict them. Not least the shadow of paediatrician Professor Sir Roy Meadow, the child abuse "expert" whose flawed evidence helped convict innocent mothers like Sally Clark and Angela Canning, which hung over the conviction.

Although Meadows did not give evidence at the Gays' trial, his published work on a handful of cases of alleged salt poisoning provided the foundation for the prosecution experts who did – most notably George Haycock, a professor of paediatrics. He calculated that it would have needed 30-40grams of salt – four teaspoons – taken orally to raise the child's blood salt levels to those reached on his admission to hospital.

But as the trial progressed, medical opinion was shown to be divided over just about every health aspect of Christian's life and death. Although high levels of sodium chloride were found in his blood, there was a split between those who thought it had to be deliberate poisoning and those who said his body was naturally not excreting salt properly. The prosecution case against the Gays was also adapted as it became clear that bruising found at the post mortem to the brain had occurred while he was in hospital, not in their care. And other troubling aspects of Christian's health, including a "unique" history of heart damage and hydrocephalus diagnosed on one his many admissions to hospital, long before he went into the Gays' care, were never properly explored in court.

The couple won an appeal last April after a leading chemical pathologist told the Court of Appeal he believed that because of a problematic brain mechanism, the child's body was not properly regulating levels of sodium in the blood. Dr Glyn Walters said his body would maintain "grossly abnormal sodium concentrations", and this would explain why Christian's sodium levels did not reduce as they should have done after he was admitted to intensive care: the amount of sodium chloride remained unnaturally low in his urine and unnaturally high in his blood.

One might have thought this would be an end to it – particularly as the Court of Appeal in the Angela Canning case had ruled that when medical opinion over the possibility of natural causes is split, and when there is no other evidence of foul play (as in the Gays' case), then criminal charges should not be brought. The judges accepted that their decision might mean that in a very small number of cases, parents who had killed a child without leaving a trace may escape justice. But they added: "That is an undesirable result, which, however, avoids a worse one. Unless we are sure of guilt the dreadful possibility always remains that a mother, already brutally scarred by the unexplained death or deaths of her babies, may find herself in prison for life for killing them when she should not be there at all. In our community, and in any civilised community, that is abhorrent."

In spite of this, the CPS decided the Gays should face a retrial. What's more, they stuck to that curious decision even after the failed prosecution last summer of another young mother accused of poisoning her toddler with salt. Marianne Williams, 24, was cleared of both manslaughter and murder of her son Joshua Taylor after it emerged that the child's death may have been caused by medication he had received for kidney problems. During her six-week trial her lawyers forced many damning admissions from medical experts in the case. They included the fact that many of Joshua's eleven daily medicines were high in salt and contributed to the high sodium levels found in his body; that doctors treating him in hospital were "unaware" that levels of sodium given to him would be considered illegal in the US; that in treating Joshua days before he died, doctors had relied on a medical equation used for adults not children; and they had not tested for other conditions that might lead to high levels of sodium in the blood.

One prosecution expert called to support the claim that Joshua was force-fed salt admitted that he had miscalculated the amounts of sodium given to the boy when he was rushed to hospital. The consultant paediatrician also agreed that he "could not tell" whether Joshua was administered salt before he arrived in hospital or when he was being treated by doctors. That expert was none other than Professor Haycock.

No doubt this is why the CPS decided not to rely on Haycock at the Gays' retrial, instead bringing in consultant paediatric nephrologist Malcolm Coulthard to support the poisoning hypothesis. He just happens to be Haycock's co-author on a paper about distinguishing salt poisoning from natural causes as an explanation for high salt levels.

Fortunately for the Gays, the jury recognised the limitations of the science and ended their ordeal. Their solicitor, William Bache, said: "Cases like this, on the edge of medical science, should never come to court. The scientific evidence is so equivocal. If there is such a degree of uncertainty, people should not be put at risk of injustice."

Still doing time

AT LONG last the Criminal Cases Review Commission has referred the case of convicted murderer and fairground worker Robert Kennedy back to the Court of Appeal.

Kennedy, now 42, has already served two years beyond his 14-year "tariff", or recommended jail term, because he is protesting his innocence of the murder of a gay Plymouth pensioner Arthur Eathorne, in September 1990. The *Eye* reported a year ago that new DNA evidence had undermined the prosecution case that Kennedy had been in the pensioner's flat smoking cigarettes. Tests of saliva found on a cigarette end in Eathorne's Hoe flat did not match Kennedy. At the time, the saliva was said to be his because it was left by a "non-secretor" – someone whose blood type cannot be identified from other bodily fluids – and Kennedy was a non-secretor. But then so are one in four of the population.

That flawed forensic evidence was also a factor in the decision not to pursue at least one other suspect who had admitted visiting Mr Eathorne for sex some time before the murder. The "non-secretor" was said to have visited after that suspect had left. Now the CCRC has also uncovered evidence that supports Kennedy's contention that he was at home when Eathorne was fatally struck over the head with a blunt instrument. Detailed work on Eathorne's kinetic watch – powered by human movement and which clearly stopped after his death – has put the time of death much earlier than the prosecution suggested at Kennedy's trial.

Last summer as part of a re-investigation of the case by Devon and Cornwall Police, officers appealed for witnesses – not something police usually do when someone is already locked up for the crime. Further, officers went to the United States to interview a key prosecution lawyer over the issue of non-disclosure of material crucial to the defence. Kennedy's lawyer, Maslen Merchant, has now been handed three lever-arch files of undisclosed material and believes there is more – particularly in relation to other suspects.

Key to that material was an anonymous tip-off naming another local man as the killer. That named man's fingerprint was found on an item recovered from the flat. It took nearly two years, until November 2002, for the CCRC to begin its review. The investigation by Devon and Cornwall Police has taken nearly another two years. Yet the only evidence now supporting Kennedy's conviction is – as so often in miscarriage of justice cases – the so-called cell confession, which Kennedy denies making.

Kennedy was 25 when he went to prison. He is now middle-aged. As he recently told his lawyer, "I have done 16 years for a crime I did not commit. I do not know how much more I can take. I'm finding it harder and harder as each day goes by...."

EXPERTS

Surgical precision?

THE Home Office pathologist called in to investigate the death of Jean Charles de Menezes, shot by police at Stockwell tube station, has been found guilty of serious professional misconduct.

When Dr Kenneth Shorrock (pictured) was approached to carry out the de Menezes autopsy, he was about to face a General Medical Council disciplinary hearing: his alterations to a post mortem report in another case had led to a surgeon being accused of manslaughter after a patient bled to death.

The GMC heard that in his first report on Gladys Allen, 78, Dr Shorrock, then a consultant pathologist at the Royal Halifax Hospital, said she had been given "necessary surgery" by locum consultant urologist Hurais Ramis Syed. He said there was "no definite evidence of any avoidable deficiency in the medical or surgical treatment that she received".

But Shorrock produced a second report after the coroner asked him "to reconsider his findings", in which he deleted the sentence clearing the surgeon of blame and wrote: "Likely that death was contributed to by inadvertence, both before and during the operation." He also changed his witness statement from "left renal artery had been transacted close to its origin", to "a hole in the aorta where the stump of the aorta would normally be found". Mr Syed was charged with manslaughter but cleared at Leeds Crown Court in 2003.

In its ruling, the GMC panel found the changes were "unprofessional, inconsistent, unreasonable, inappropriate and not based upon the medical and

pathological information available to him; and that they were likely to bring the medical profession into disrepute". Of course Dr Shorrock also put a statement that was not based upon "medical or pathological information" in his report on de Menezes: he said the Brazilian had leapt over the ticket barriers while being chased by police – something which turned out not to be true.

However, after hearing that Dr Shorrock had changed his working practices, had carried out 115 further autopsies without complaint, and had the support of his colleagues, the GMC panel decided he should not be struck off or suspended. Instead, Dr Shorrock was given a reprimand. So that's all right then.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

IN WHAT IS expected to be his final Budget next week, Gordon Brown will doubtless once again declare his determination to stamp out tax avoidance and target those who sell and use tax schemes. The Treasury has been hyperactive on the scheme-bashing front in recent weeks.

This is a riff Brown has played since 1997, when in his first Budget he declared that Labour would be "relentless in its war" against tax avoidance. After the uproar later that year over his pal and Treasury minister Geoffrey Robinson's nice little offshore earner, Brown emphasised that he was "determined to stem leakage by detecting, deterring and defeating tax avoidance".

Now, like leading private equity player Sir Ronald Cohen, it seems that another Brown business ally is set on causing the Chancellor embarrassment. This time it is Labour-friendly Tesco chief executive Sir Terry Leahy, who is on Brown's international panel of advisors on globalization.

"We must be near the City"

As a Dispatches documentary about Tesco on Channel 4 last month detailed, Leahy has made sure the company founded by the family of arch-Thatcherite Dame Shirley Porter has kept close to New Labour. It has sponsored party events, backed government programmes, and even employed Cherie Blair as its QC on a number of occasions. Leahy in turn was nominated by the Dear Leader for a knighthood.

Since 2003, Tesco has been an avid consumer of what the City calls "tax planning" and the Treasury brands "tax avoidance". The 800lb supermarket gorilla has established a large number of companies, unit trusts and partnerships in the offshore tax havens of Jersey and the Cayman Islands. It has also more recently employed the services of one of the Revenue's pet hates – a tax scheme promoter.

Some of this offshore activity has been related to its financial operations but much has been part of Tesco's ambitious programme for raising money by sale and leaseback joint ventures using its stores and warehouses, valued at around £20bn. Since 2004, Tesco has raised more than £1.5bn from such property deals and it plans to raise £5bn by 2011.

However, an expensive headache to Tesco and would-be purchasers was the 4 percent Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) which Brown introduced in 2003. This was brought in to reduce Stamp Duty avoidance, a measure which in 2002 the then Treasury minister Ruth Kelly said was necessary to "stop the growing avoidance of Stamp Duty by a minority at the expense of the majority". That majority are homebuyers who have no way to escape the tax.

SDLT is payable by the buyer on all big commercial property sales – in theory. But it increasingly became a voluntary tax as lawyers and accountants developed clever "tax efficient" methods that legally avoided it. This was a win-win for buyers and sellers. The buyer avoided the tax and as a result, the seller received a higher price. Often they would split the saving. The only loser was the Treasury: the take from SDLT on commercial property sales almost halved between 2003-4 and 2004-5 from £1.28bn to £760m.

A large part of that loss was due to Brown creating a loophole through which billions in UK property was moved offshore. This was "seeding relief" which in particular exempted properties transferred into new unit trusts from SDLT. Introduced in December 2003, by March 2006 – when the loophole was closed – an estimated £20bn-£30bn of UK property had been moved into property unit trusts in Jersey and Guernsey SDLT-free. A loss to the Revenue of perhaps more than £1bn.

Offshore unit trusts and partnerships were ideal for those who did not pay full or any UK tax – such as foreign or non-domiciled investors or pension funds and insurance companies. Offshore entities also paid no UK tax on capital gains.

One of the main offshore beneficiaries of this boom was the leading Jersey law firm Mourant du Feu & Jeune, which acts for Tesco. It boasted of forming half the 400 Jersey property unit trusts formed in 2005 alone.

Not surprisingly therefore, Tesco did not miss out on the "every little helps" legal opportunity presented by unit trusts and partnerships. Just before the end of the tax years 2004 and 2005 Tesco realised first £650m and then £366m by way of joint ventures with the Zakay brothers and Vincent Tchenguiz. Then in November 2005 Tesco raised more than £150m by a joint venture with Morley Fund Management via a Jersey unit trust. Another £50m was realised when a further site was injected into the deal last year. The offshore structures and legal tax loopholes undoubtedly enabled Tesco to obtain a better price.

Tax is a subject close to Terry Leahy's corporate wallet – as it is to Brown's own personal private equity "locust", Sir Ronald Cohen at Apax Partners. Three years ago the Tesco chief complained that "the things that sap our strength are high tax and excessive regulations".

By March last year, Brown, who had promised "vigilance against tax avoidance" ahead of introducing SDLT, realised he had scored a spectacular own goal with "seeding relief" and acted to end the abuse. Except that once again he was outwitted by the tax scheme promoters.

Enter Philip Shirley, a low profile City accountant well known to the Revenue and those who ply the tax scheme trade. The Revenue had already acted against one of Shirley's schemes in 2002. But it lost a second appeal last month against one of Shirley's clients, City headhunter Philippa D'Arcy of the Rose Partnership, who used the Shirley scheme to avoid £600,000 in tax. "If the scheme had not been stopped there would only have been two things preventing every taxpayer in the country from completely obliterating their income tax liability," stated a tax expert.

Shirley, like others, spotted a way round the supposed ban on using partnerships to avoid SDLT: the introduction of an additional individual limited partner into the partnership structure. Previously these had been only companies. Shirley is reluctant to discuss the partnerships or his dealings with Tesco.

From August last year, Tesco created nine UK-registered limited partnerships – Tesco Aqua, Blue, Fuchsia, Grey, Pink, Purple, Red, Violet and White. In September, Shirley became a limited partner in Aqua, Blue, Fuchsia and Pink. He invested a total of £500,000 while eight Cayman limited partnerships, in which Tesco executives featured as partners, run out of Mourants' Cayman office, put in £1.85m. In the others the limited partners were Cayman companies. These were later replaced in some cases by Jersey unit trusts.

From October, Tesco transferred more than 70 stores into five of the partnerships – Aqua, Blue, Fuchsia, Pink and Red. Many of the stores appeared to be leased on unusual terms – such as £2 a year for 999 years. Property lawyers suggest this is another legal tax-driven ploy designed to designate the premium paid for the property as for varying a lease rather than for the property itself, therefore avoiding SDLT.

Then, in January, Tesco announced it had raised £445m via a joint venture with the British Airways pension fund. The 16 stores involved had been transferred into the Tesco Red partnership whose limited partners were a company in the Caymans and a Jersey unit trust. Shares in an offshore unit trust can be sold without any SDLT liability. The Tesco Red deal, funded by Deutsche Bank, was concluded the day before Brown, in his December Pre-Budget Report, banned new attempts to avoid SDLT. The latest measures were necessary, announced the Treasury, to "make ineffective a number of schemes involving the use of leases, partnerships and sub-sales that are currently being exploited in an attempt to avoid paying SDLT".

If SDLT was effectively avoided on the Tesco Red deal, this could have cost the Treasury almost £18m. This could make the total in SDLT legally avoided by four Tesco joint venture deals since 2004 up to £65m.

It remains to be seen just what will happen to the four Shirley-linked partnerships and the stores they control. That particular tax scheme no longer works. But UK tax changes are rarely retrospective. And tax experts point out that as the properties were transferred last October, before the window was slammed shut in December, any deals done for those properties could well still legally avoid SDLT.

See over ➨

THE DIRECTORS — DREDGE & RIGG

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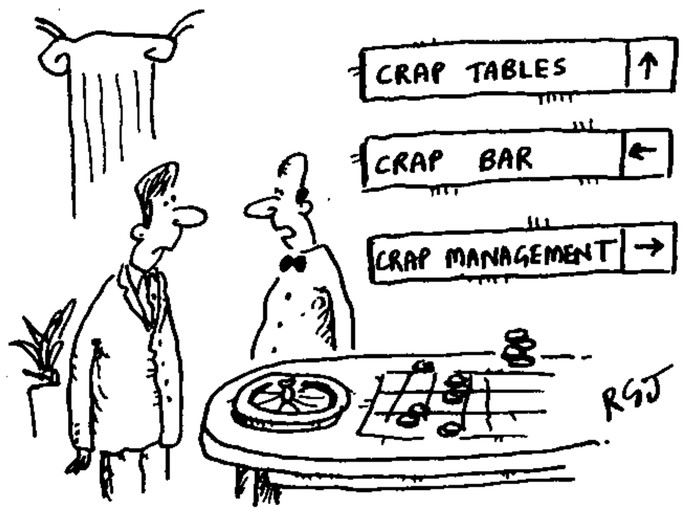

"We're a not-very-super-casino"

Given that the £445m value of the properties in the BA deal represented only a quarter of the stores held by the colour partnerships, there could be properties worth another £1bn plus that could avoid SDLT if the same route is taken, costing the Treasury up to another £40m.

All of which may not bring a smile to Gordon Brown's face the next time he sits down with Terry Leahy – a director of each of the companies that run the colour partnerships. But as Tesco, one of the largest corporate taxpayers, declared when questioned about its property deals for the *Dispatches* documentary last month: "Shareholders expect it to carry out transactions in a tax-efficient way." Indeed they do. But the Treasury may be less impressed with the Chancellor's new best friend.

"MY DUTY is to the law first," declared the Attorney-general Lord Goldsmith defending his gagging of the BBC over its cash for honours story. Why, therefore, were "national security and our highest priority foreign policy objectives in the Middle East" more important when it came to Goldsmith forcing the Serious Farce Office to drop its probe into BAE Systems and kickbacks to Saudi royals?

This contradiction is likely to be raised with British officials at an OECD anti-bribery meeting in Paris this week. Doubtless the answer given will not be because the Dear Leader directed his "independent" legal poodle to see his first duty as keeping the corrupt Saudi princes sweet in the "wider public interest" of the £10bn Eurofighter contract.

THREE executive directors of Photo-Me International sold more than £750,000 worth of shares in February ahead of a 2 March profit warning that knocked the price by more than 20 percent.

The company – admitting the sales were "diplomatically appalling" – denied that the directors (who continue to hold shares and options) had acted on any inside information, and said that the sales, following the exercise of share options, had been approved. Of course. The directors were obviously blissfully unaware of the "disappointing" January trading and "deteriorated" future prospects at the company they ran when they sold. But if all was hunky-dory, why did they sell?

THE plight of Leeds United – threatened with relegation from the Championship – slightly improved after the win over Luton, but prospects for its much-loved chairman Ken Bates and his Swiss backers Fortress Sports Fund are not enviable.

According to its latest accounts, the football club must repay £12m by 30 June, most to Fortress or its investors. With a loss last year of £4.5m and net liabilities of £24m, the Leeds United accounts were prepared on a "going concern" basis but without the guarantees of support from Fortress similar to those provided by Roman Abramovich at Bates' old club, Chelsea, or Mohamed Fayed at Fulham in similar circumstances. Now there are stories – undoubtedly exaggerated – of potential large VAT liabilities to concern fans who wonder how the club will cope with the lower TV revenues and gate money if relegation comes. Thankfully they have Ken Bates in charge to ensure the same financial success he brought to Chelsea.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 335

by Cyclops

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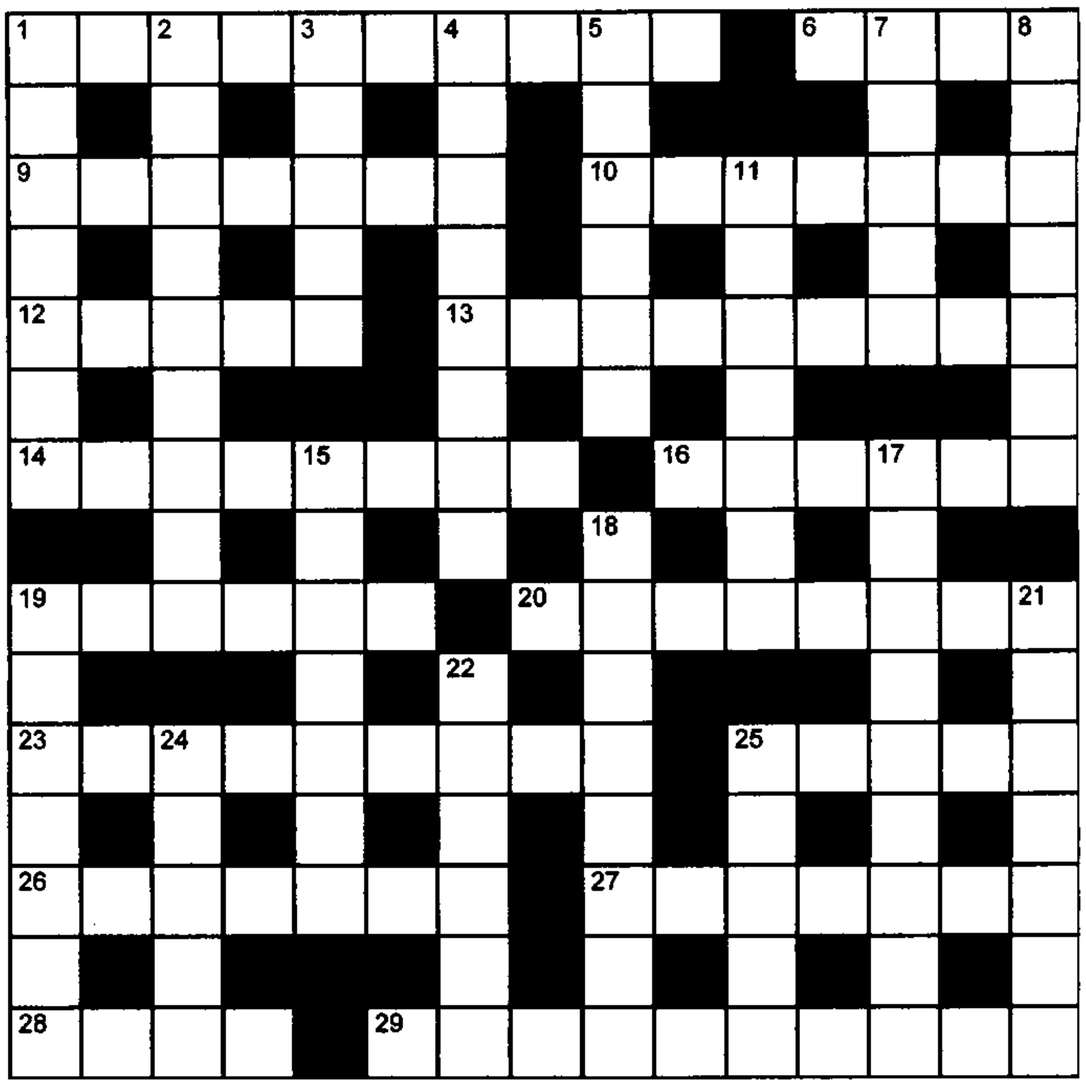

ACROSS

1 An earful, as Hitler was in need of if the song is true? (10)
6 Say "publicity" and bugger me the old English way (4)
9 Dull, stupid type of taxi banter at first? Decline! (7)
10 Decadent place, honey capital – academic leaves (7)
12 Tetchy Archer starts to do what Archer does, tipping back port (5)
13 Nobody special, Stalin familiarly rants on the web about US money (3,6)
14 Nameless wanker Tom tossed, pulling together (8)
16 Duplicitous, his dodgy folio precedes gutless Blair (6)
19 Spunk container (6)
20 Wobbling tits, rude? Rubbish! (8)
23 See those who swing both ways dance – endlessly amusing (9)
25 Votes Conservative, hiding provisional concern (5)
26 Dubya's half having a puke – botched reshuffle (5-2)
27 Shortly down to one's Y-fronts almost? (2,5)
28 As featured in the *Sun*, in fact, IT survey (4)
29 Blair aide after outing, "Cut his balls off!"? (4,6)

DOWN

1 Churchman murdered by model – did Blair really think she was up to the job? (7)
2 Old politician snapped "Tell an obnoxious person like Robert Maxwell" (9)
3 Applying ring to member is visually stimulating work (2,3)
4/18 Unconsidered response, typical of tabloid press, a blow to the balls for someone? (4-4,8)
5 Caught sticking bar up Roger (6)
7 Labour forced here to fall behind after Gordon just started getting upper class (5)
8 House of Windsor? Extremely dodgy and obnoxious! (7)
11 Windy type of bishop meeting drunken lecher (7)
15 PM, having a disastrous poll – held in awe somehow! (7)
17 One who's into sex objectively? (9)
18 See 4dn.
19 Nappy contents not hot – watch out for mites (7)
21 Teaser showing top of sizeable chest (7)
22 Do something with your gifts – shut your face! (4,2)
24 S-stupid prat, our Dave (5)
25 Also, getting penetrated by sailor is prohibited (5)

Crossword 334 winner: K.J. WILLIAMS

ACROSS: 1 Rumpus 5 Birdcall 9/10 Shitting bricks 11 Pain 12/26 Missionary position 13 Edifice 15 Threw up 17 Yfronts 19 Spreads 21 Piss-taking 24 Surf 25 Hi tech 27 Emissary 28 Stroke.

DOWN: 2 Unheard of 3 Putin 4 Seismic 5 Bogus 6 Rubbish 7 Clientele 8 Laker 14 Frogs legs 16 Underwork 18 Trachea 20 Pegasus 22 Idiom 23 Imply 24 Satyr.

YOBETTES
HUSBAND
That was so sweet
What was?
Jez has heard about Gaz dying and he's just said...
..If I want a quick shag anytime to take my mind off things to give him
Aah bless
a ring

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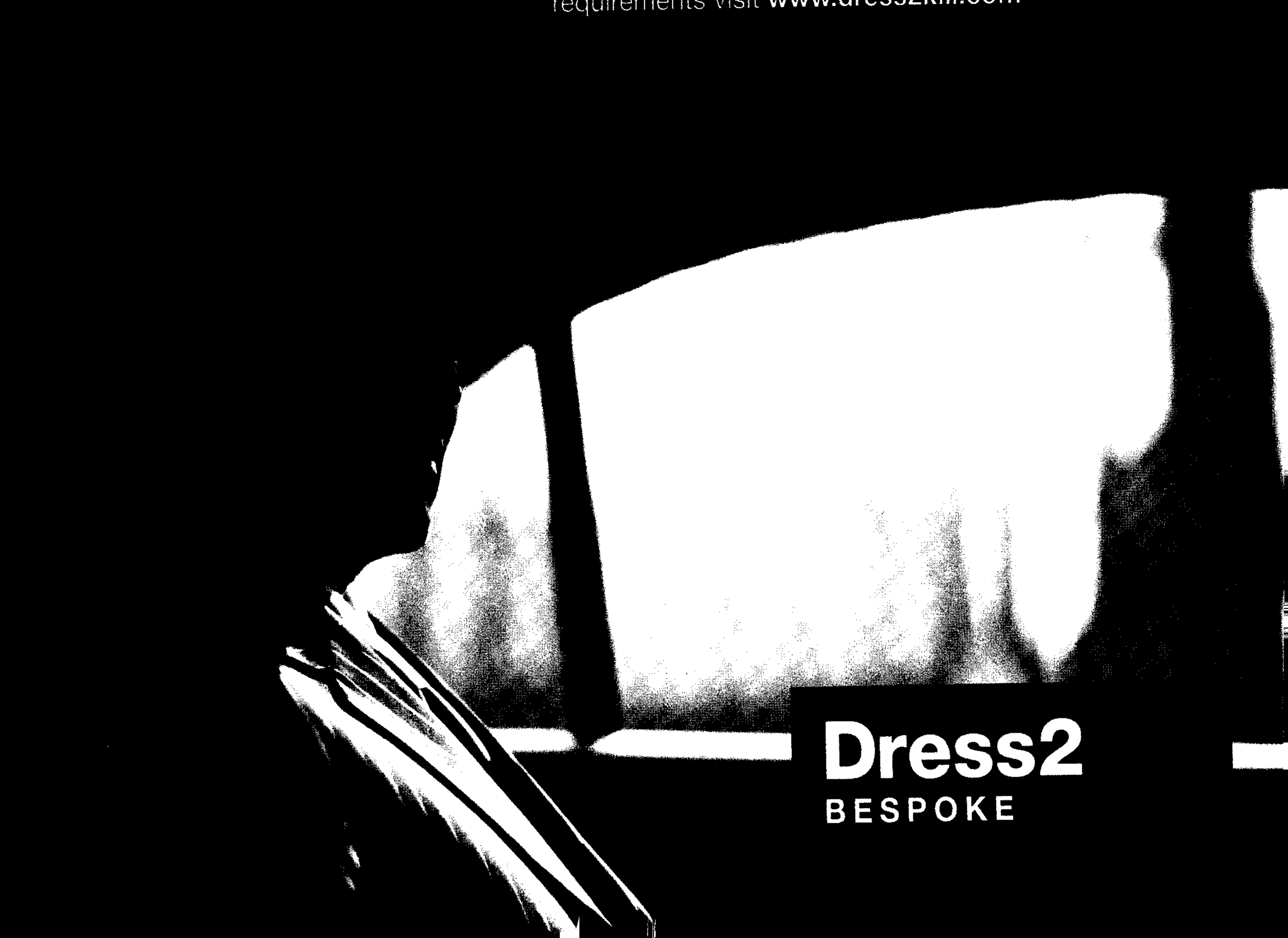

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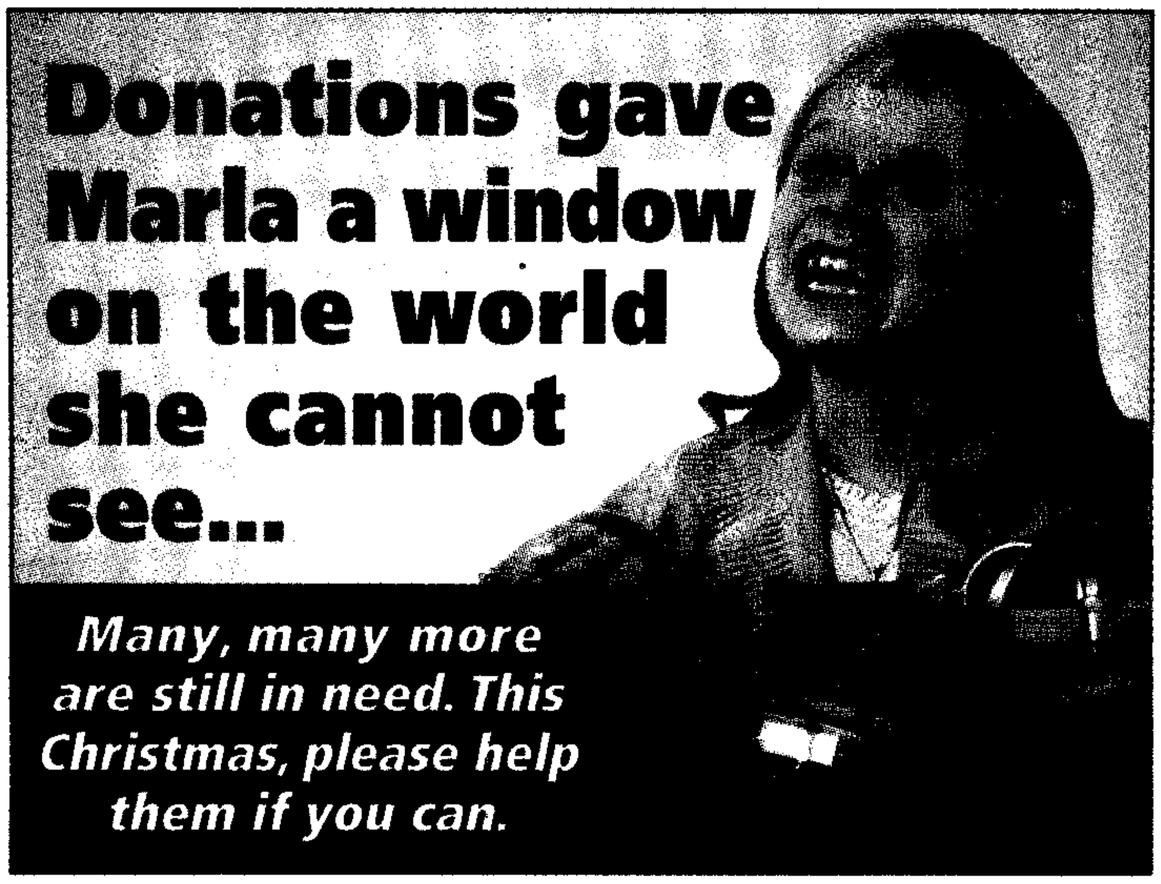

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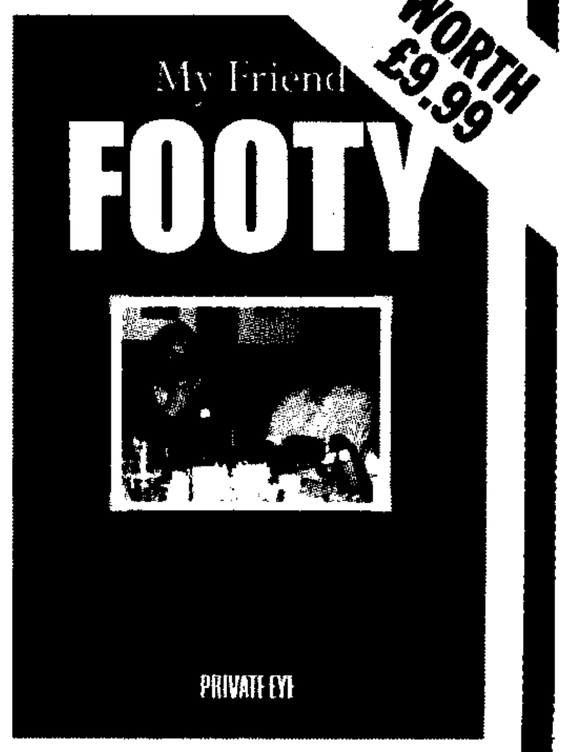

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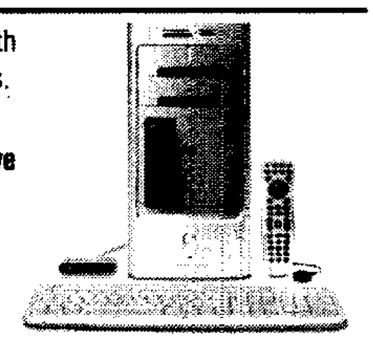

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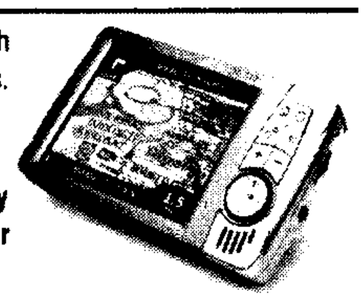

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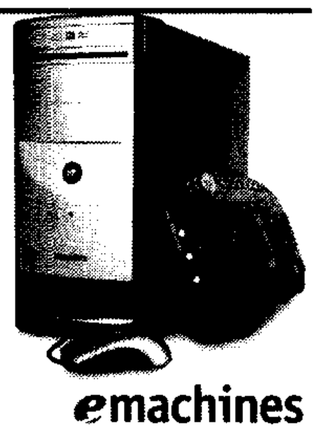

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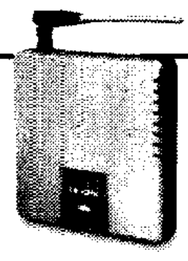

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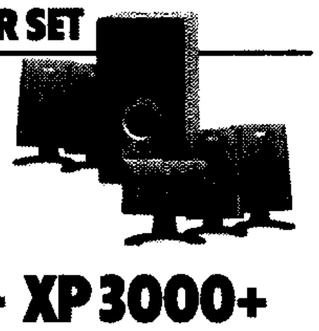

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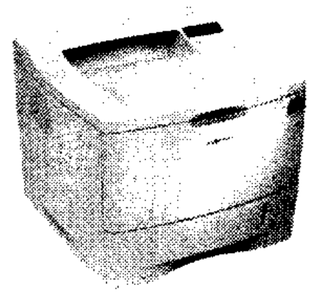

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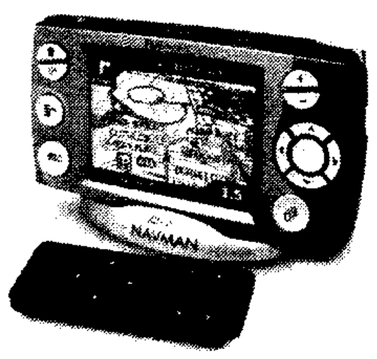

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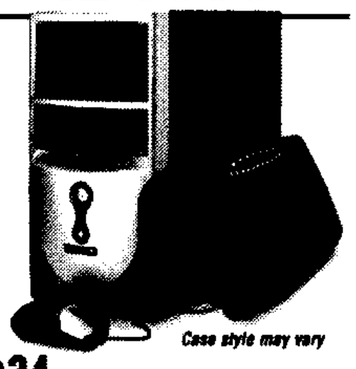

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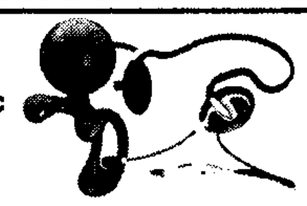

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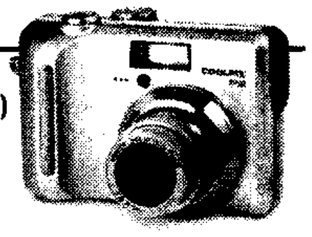

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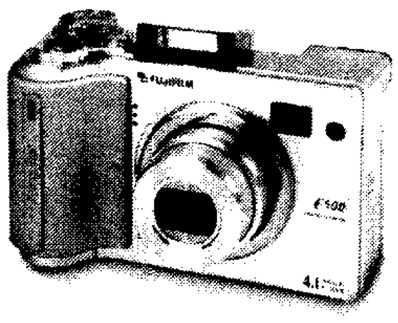

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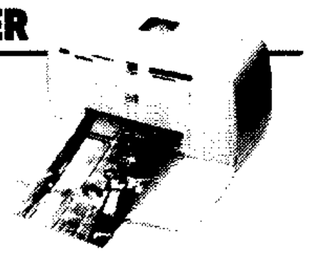

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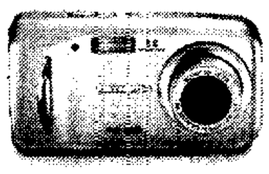

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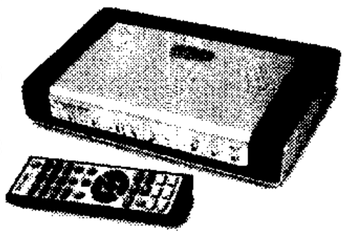

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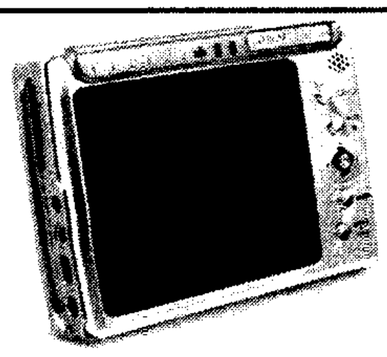

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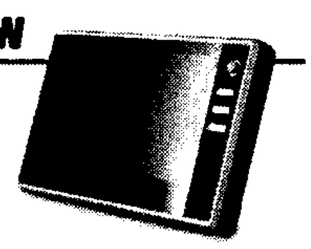

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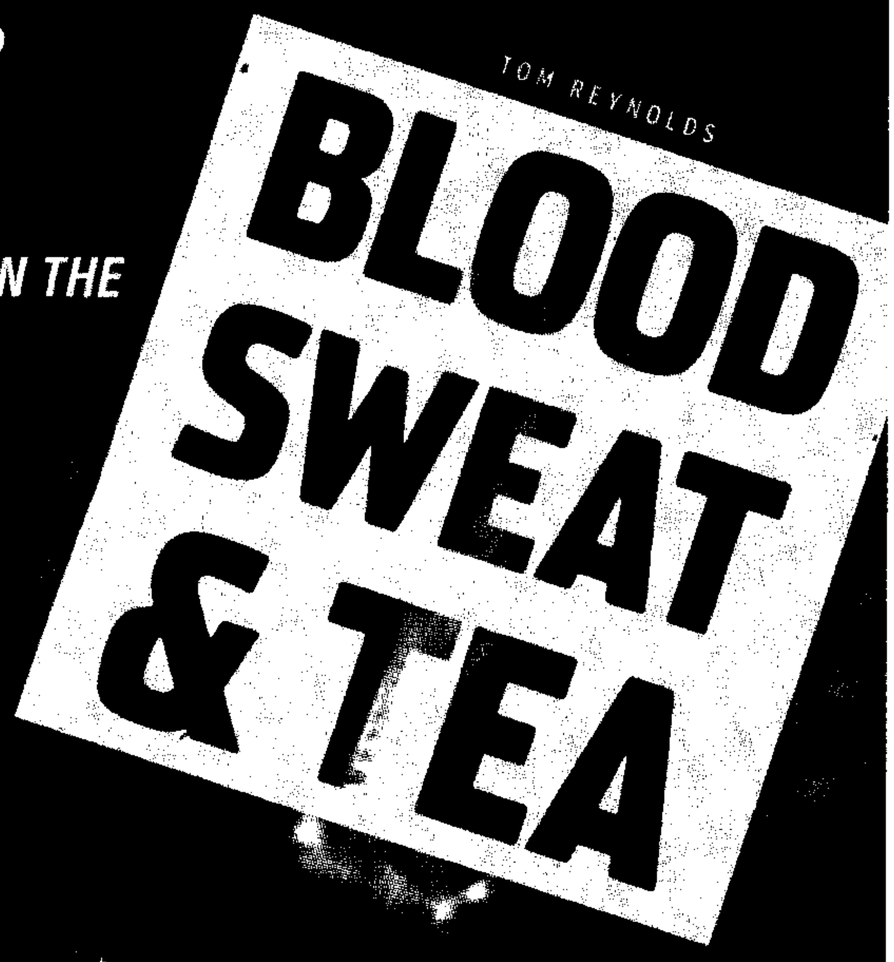

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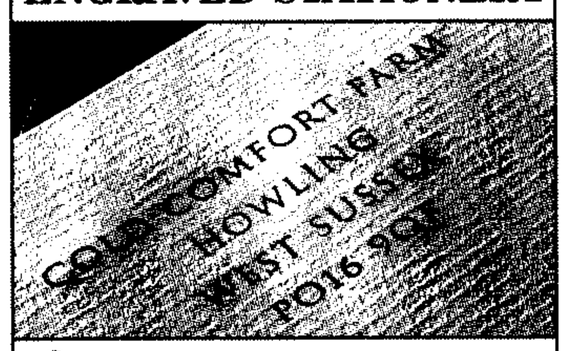

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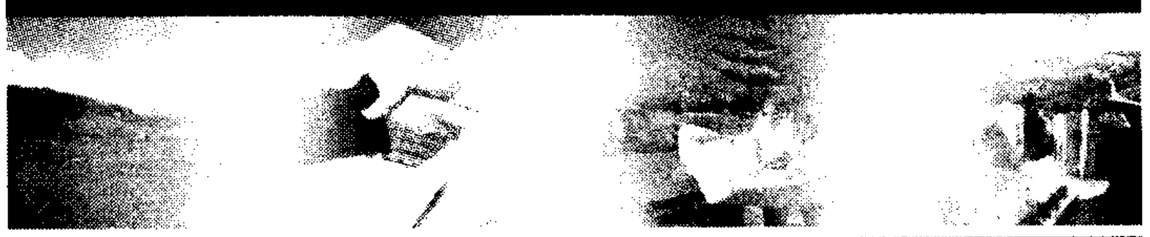

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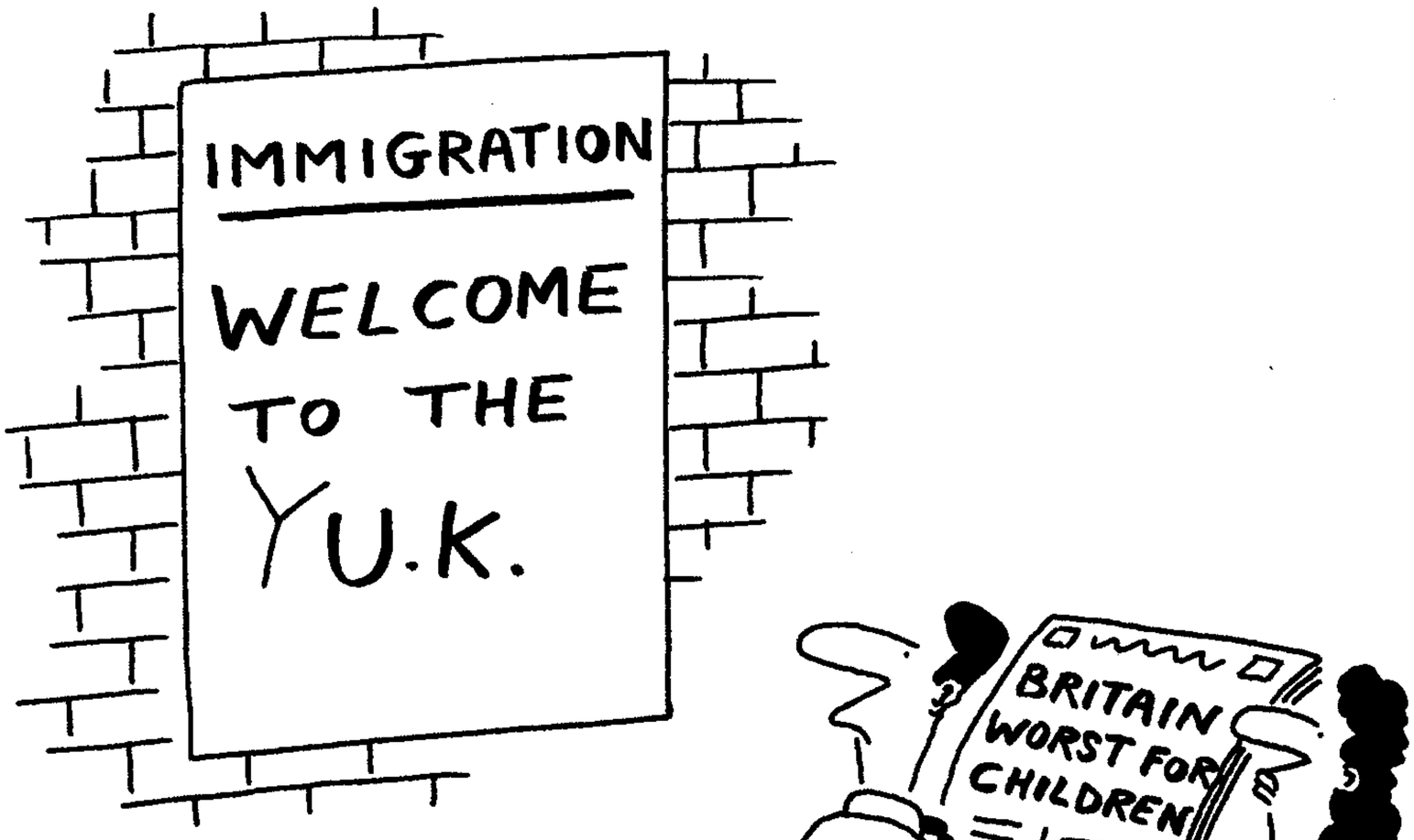

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